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**Engaging Phronesis: Religious Education with  
Primary Initial Teacher Education students**

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A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

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January 2017

## **Abstract:**

Subject of the thesis:

This thesis considers the initial teacher education of non-specialist primary undergraduate student teachers in teaching Religious Education. The focus of the research is a short module taught in the second year of the students' degree course, which prepares students to teach in predominantly multicultural classrooms in London. The module adopts an Interpretive Approach to Religious Education, which contributes to a realignment of the students' conceptualisation of knowledge through examination of the concepts of *episteme* and *phronesis*. Findings show that overt acknowledgement of the student teachers' developing professional understandings, situated in decisions which reference values as well as subject knowledge, can alter their understanding and confidence about teaching Religious Education and indicates wider benefit in their appreciation of their developing teacher personae.

### The Structure of the Research

Chapter 1 is a contextual introduction which presents a series of lenses through which to view the Religious Education module.

Chapter 2 is an exploration of three main ideas which influenced the research: the Interpretive Approach to RE, the concept of *phronesis*, and the benefits to understanding pedagogy through self-study in teacher education.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological thinking behind the research, ethical considerations and the methods employed. These include practitioner research, use of ethnographic and reflexive lenses and analysis of data from both students and personal reflection through self-study.

Chapter 4 reports the findings from the research carried out with students, exploring the ideas which emerge from their responses to the module and my observations and interviews which illuminate ideas which emerge from the analysis.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the content and development of the module itself, exploring the impact and development of activities which influence the students' understanding of RE.

Chapter 6 draws together the threads of the research to explore the vision of a transformative ITE RE module, which recognises the value of acknowledging and developing *phronesis* in primary non-specialist student teacher education and concludes with recommendations to improve the current situation in RE in primary ITE.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my very deep appreciation of the continuing support and encouragement I have received from my family, colleagues in the Education Department at Middlesex University and further afield, and friends who have assisted me during the research.

My particular thanks go to Dr. Victoria de Rijke, my Director of Studies, and Dr. Leena Robertson, my supervisor, who together have advised and guided me from the beginning, through changes of direction and methodology, focus and findings, helping me to explore my own understandings and development as well as that of my students.

Finally I would like to thank my family, especially Simon, David and Edward for their unflagging and loving support. I recognise that without their continuing encouragement this research would not have been possible.

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## Timeline of research

|                 |            |                       |
|-----------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Action research | Transition | Practitioner Research |
|-----------------|------------|-----------------------|

| Dates of academic years | Relevant publications   | Research Methods employed<br>Questionnaires<br>Entry / exit questionnaires<br>cohort response numbers   | Teaching and research commitments (additions noted each year in bold)  |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|
| 2006-07                 | Standards for Teachers 2004<br>Publication of the Ajegbo Report | Action Research<br>Entry questionnaire<br>57 students<br>Essay analysis<br>Reflections  | Primary RE BA Year 2,<br>PGCE,GTP<br>School Experience<br><b>REDCo research</b>  |
| 2007-08                 | Change in Teacher Standards to TDA 2007<br>Ofsted Report on RE  | Action Research<br>Entry questionnaire<br>50 students<br>Essay analysis<br>field notes, reflections   | Primary RE BA Year 2,<br>PGCE,GTP<br>School Experience<br>REDCo research   |
| 2008-09                 | publications<br><br>Whitworth, 2009;                            | Action Research<br>Entry questionnaire<br>57 students<br>Essay analysis<br>lesson observations<br>interviews<br>field notes, reflections  | Primary RE BA Year 2,<br>PGCE,GTP<br>School Experience<br>REDCo research and write-up                                  |
| 2009-10                 | Change in Government<br>New policies on teacher education       | Transition from Action to Practitioner research<br>School observations<br>Paradigm shift with Isobel<br>Entry questionnaire<br>50 students<br>Exit questionnaire (pilot)<br>20 students<br>Essay analysis | Primary RE BA Year 2,<br>PGCE,GTP<br>School Experience<br><b>BA Year 1 Humanities</b>                                  |
| 2010-11                 | Ofsted Report<br><i>Transforming RE</i>                         | Practitioner Research<br>Entry questionnaire<br>14 students<br>Session feedback and reflection<br>Exit questionnaire<br>40 students<br>Essays analysis interviews<br>Field notes                          | Primary BA Year 2, PGCE,GTP<br>RE<br><b>BA Year 3 Inclusive Practices</b><br>BA Year 1 Humanities<br>School Experience |

|         |  |  |   |
|---------|--|--|---|
| 2011-12 | Change in Teacher Standards  | Practitioner Research<br>Teacher self-study methodology<br>Entry questionnaire<br>51 students<br>Exit questionnaire<br>50 students<br>Essay analysis | Primary BA Year 2, PGCE,GTP<br>RE<br>BA Year 3 Inclusive Practices<br>BA Year 1 Humanities<br>School Experience   |
| 2012-13 | APPG – <i>The Truth Unmasked</i>   | Practitioner Research<br>Module reviews<br>Entry questionnaire discontinued<br>Exit questionnaire<br>60 students<br>Essay analysis                   | Primary BA Year 2, PGCE,GTP<br>RE<br>Year 3 Inclusive Practices<br>Year 1 Humanities<br>School Experience<br>Primary Community of Practice Research<br><b>Research into RE in Primary ITE for APPG</b><br><b>Research into Fundamental British Values</b> |
| 2013-14 | Religious Education Council Review<br><i>NCJRE</i><br>APPG - <i>RE and Community Cohesion</i><br>Ofsted Report<br><i>Realising the Potential</i><br>Preparation for new primary curriculum | Practitioner Research<br>Entry questionnaire –groups responses 71students<br>Exit questionnaire<br>29 students<br>Essay analysis<br>School visits    | Primary BA RE Year 2, PGCE,GTP<br>Year 3 Inclusive Practices<br><b>Primary Year 3 Humanities (new module)</b><br>Year 1 Humanities<br>School Experience   |
| 2014-15 |  | Practitioner Research<br>Ethnographic methods<br>No exit questionnaire<br>Reflections  | Primary BA RE Year 2, PGCE,SD<br>Year 3 Inclusive Practices<br>Year 3 Humanities<br>Year 1 Humanities<br>School Experience  |
| 2015-16 | <i>A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in schools</i><br><i>RE for REal</i><br>REC commission call   | Practitioner Research<br>Teacher self-study<br>Ethnographic methods<br>Reflections   | Primary BA RE Year 2, PGCE,SD<br>Year 3 Inclusive Practices<br>Year 3 Humanities<br>Year 1 Humanities<br>School Experience  |
| 2016-17 | Commission for Religious Education<br>Interim Report<br><i>Religious Education for All</i>   |  |   |



## Introduction

The research reported in this thesis is based on a specific Religious Education (RE) module, taught between 2006-2016, to primary Year 2 undergraduate initial teacher education (ITE) students, at a university based in north London. It is developed from a research project into how the Interpretive Approach (Jackson, 1997, 2004) might be embedded in a university module and how that might affect non-specialist students' understanding of teaching primary RE. This research was conducted between 2006-2009, using a Community of Practice framework, (Wenger, 1998), led by Professor Robert Jackson as part of the European '*Religion in Education: A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries?*' (REDCo) project (Weisse, 2007).

Initially, my research focused on understanding these three questions:

1. How could the Interpretive Approach be taught to non-specialist student teachers in a short course on religious education?
2. How might it contribute to student teachers' understanding of teaching primary religious education?
3. Could it assist student teachers in developing confidence in teaching religious education?

The research findings for this phase of the research were reported in Whitworth (2009) and these informed the research in this thesis. Following the conclusion of the Warwick REDCo Community of Practice in 2009, my research, evolving through a developing framework of methods, investigated a relationship between the Interpretive Approach and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) in promoting effective RE in ITE for non-specialist primary student teachers.

The RE module is considered against the backdrop of theoretical, social and political influences on RE, the primary curriculum and ITE as they have changed over the ten years of the original and subsequent study. There were no predetermined hypotheses to interrogate, because the research understands the formation of knowledge to be within the process of the research itself, and on-going beyond the end of the research period. Although the Interpretive Approach (Jackson, 1997, 2004) was identified and interrogated at the beginning of the research, and remained a consistent influence throughout, the research was not an attempt to 'prove' the effectiveness of the approach, but rather an exploration of how such an approach

might influence both tutor and students in developing their understanding of inclusive and powerful RE teaching and learning.

### **The structure of the thesis**

The thesis is predicated on an interpretive paradigm, and makes use of a range of methodologies, including: action and practitioner research, ethnographic method and teacher educator self-study, which are employed in an evolving framework to navigate the process and findings of the research.

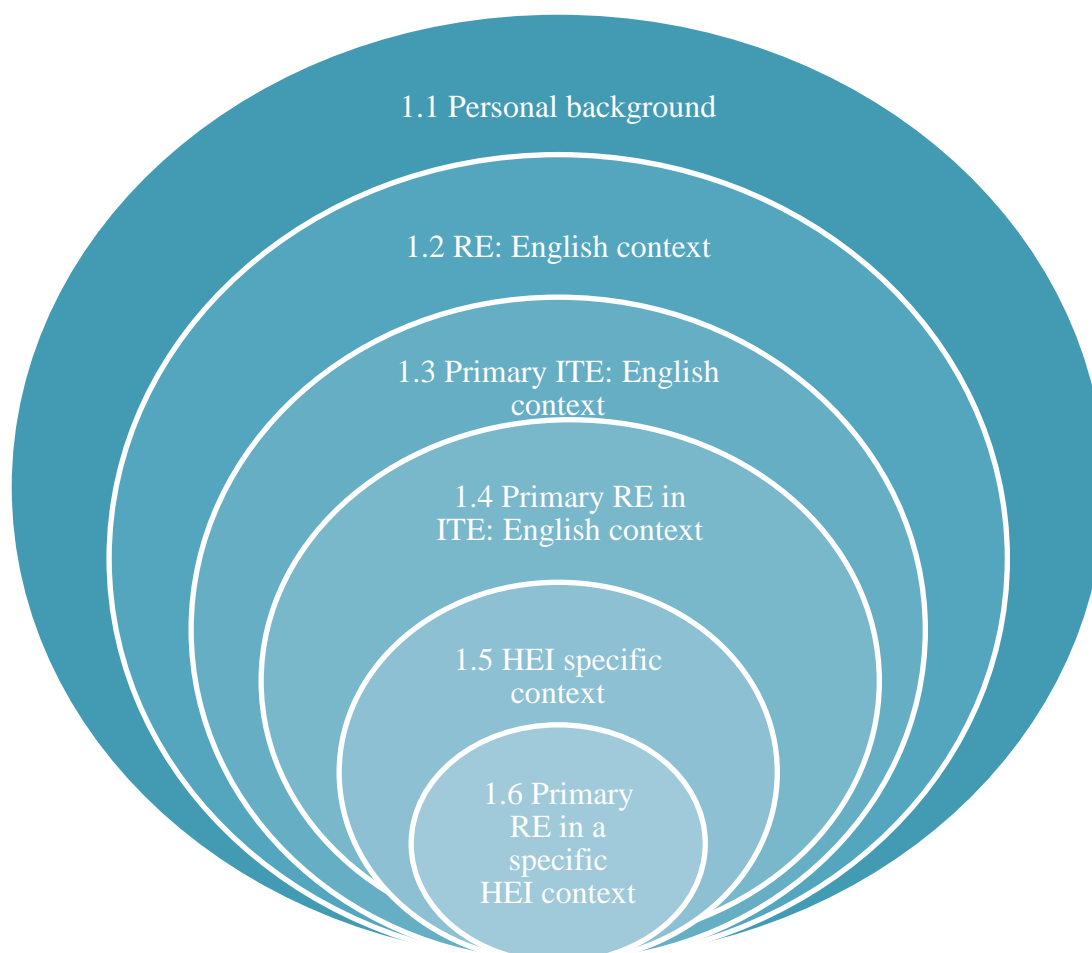
In order to develop an understanding of positionality, the thesis begins with an exploration of the context of the primary RE ITE module, through identification and discussion of different layers of influence and understandings. Rather than a separate literature review, I have identified key influences which have impacted on elements of the research and incorporated these into Chapters 1 and 2. These are also considered at different stages of the research as they are employed to test how ideas might be woven together to promote an initial educational approach to teaching RE, which seeks to create reflective and critically aware teachers. The concept of *phronesis* is employed to explore the nature of knowledge which students consider when developing their understanding of RE. The development of methodology (Chapter 3) becomes an increasingly important part of the research as a variety of approaches are explored to consider different aspects of the RE module. Findings (Chapters 4 and 5) are discussed in two ways, the first an analysis of interaction with students' understandings through questionnaires, interviews, observations and written work, and secondly through an analysis of the current module, charting its structure, aims, delivery and development through practitioner research. Analysis leads to a realisation that the module, and similar modules for the post-graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) and School Direct students, benefits from being embedded in a broader approach to inclusive pedagogies used during ITE. This prompts changes in the module itself, through emphasising *phronesis* and a developing discourse about the importance of dialogue and inclusion among the lecturer and student groups.

The thesis concludes with thoughts about the nature of knowledge and the development of RE for non-specialist primary ITE students, connecting to wider opportunities to embed understanding of RE in both ITE and continuing professional development.

## Chapter 1: Context

### Introduction

This chapter identifies the complex context of this study and the influences this has had on my research. It acknowledges a range of factors which have helped me to develop my thinking during this time. The diagram below represents my reflexive process of identifying, drilling down and analysing through layers of understanding and interpretation of RE in ITE. Each layer identifies an educational context which has bearing not only my own position, but can also be identified as an issue which impacts on student teachers' understanding of RE. Although each layer is described here and presented diagrammatically, in reality they are not in a fixed relationship but move fluidly, intersecting with each other.



*Figure 1.1 - Layers of influence on the focus of research*

## 1.1 Personal and educational background

I begin this section on context with a personal introduction and identification of the influences which have made me an RE teacher. Personal reflection on the assumptions and values which inform our understanding of education and religion are recommended by Grimmit (1987), because these underlying ideas create our understanding of knowledge and are implicated in our construction and interpretation of concepts. As Sarah Pearce notes in *You Wouldn't Understand* (2005), it is important and frequently difficult for a researcher to reflect on their own position in their research because they are the instigator, arbiter and interpreter of the material they gather. This is particularly recognised in reflexive and ethnographic research when the researcher needs to be conscious of their own attitudes and experiences to be able to recognise and address them in their work (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Jackson, 1996; Nesbitt, 2004; Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch and Sikes, 2005). This understanding of positionality is also central to the Interpretive Approach, where, rather than taking a phenomenological stance and distancing themselves from the research, students and pupils are encouraged to recognise and examine their own position when studying religions (Jackson, 1997). For Trevor Cooling, 'every teacher comes to RE with a meta-narrative which defines for them what is the nature and importance of religion.' (Cooling, 2002, 51).

This section recognises some of my experiences and reflects on how they have impacted on the context, content and understanding of my research.

I am ethnically white, female and born in England of middle class parents. All these factors inform my identity and experience of the world, and are frequently scrutinised as part of my personal and professional reflections. They are recognisable through my appearance, behaviour and speech and therefore can influence my student teachers' assumptions, attitudes and their perception of how I engage with them, so both internally and externally they have relevance in my work. I include these strands of identity because ethnicity, culture and class all play a part in the educational development of RE in Britain in the last seventy years, as Copley (1997) observes, and multiple identities are interrogated in terms of Inclusive Practices in the students' ITE programme.

My religious background is protestant Christian. Religious observance was not a strong part of my upbringing, although church attendance at Easter and Christmas was usual and there were periods during adolescence when regular daily and weekly worship meant I felt a strong

Christian identity. There have subsequently been periods of agnosticism, in part brought about through studying other religious traditions and humanism. Studying theology as part of my first degree developed my understanding of Christianity, and subsequent personal and teaching experiences, as well as research, have developed knowledge and understanding of other religious and non-faith traditions. Christianity is the religion which I understand best as both insider and outsider, as it has had the greatest influence on me morally, religiously and culturally, and this is a significant lens which needs to be recognised by me, as it influences my understanding of religious belief and practice and provides a familiar reference point, when considering religious experience.

My formal school education was from 1959-1972. I have no memories of primary RE, but in secondary school RE comprised mainly biblical studies, particularly at 'A' level. Secondary education provided an opportunity to learn about contemporary Christianity and an 'O' level syllabus which looked at contemporary moral issues. Christianity was the default religion, with a general expectation that most people would have understanding or allegiance to it, even though during the 1960s to 70s there was a decline in church attendance in England and a rising interest in new forms of spiritual experience (Copley, 1997).

My experience of theology at university was entirely focused on the Christian religion, predominantly biblical studies, church history and 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly Protestant, theologians. This developed my understanding of Christianity, but did not prepare me for a career as an RE teacher in an increasingly multicultural Britain. Religious Studies was not established in the university theology department I attended, so the dominant position was one of Christians studying Christianity to develop knowledge and understanding of faith. My own faith position was never enquired into in modules, even though by this stage I was rejecting invitations to join overtly active Christian movements and was studying Christianity as an interested outsider rather than as a practitioner. This became my default position later throughout my teaching in schools and was an established overt understanding with all my classes.

Studying for a Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) in Religious Education in Birmingham, a city with a growing multicultural and multi-religious identity, and gaining teaching experience in inner-city areas, dramatically altered my understanding of Religious Education in secondary schools. In 1975 the City of Birmingham's *Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education* created controversy because of its approach to teaching about religions

and life stances (Hull, 1984). This put RE in the centre of a social, educational and political debate about the role of RE in state education and encouraged me to consider what RE could offer young people as a way of engaging with a multicultural world. At this stage I was aware of different cultures, languages and religions in the classroom, but I felt inept in understanding the needs of ethnic minority pupils and how to recognise and address the tensions between assimilation and maintenance of cultural, linguistic and religious identities and practice which pupils were expressing during my PGCE school experience.

During the 1970s, RE development was strongly influenced by phenomenology and the study of world religions (Schools Council, 1971; Smart, 1971, 1973; Grimmitt, 1987; Copley, 1997; Jackson, 1997; Barnes, 2001; Teece, 2006) and this was the approach I adopted when teaching and designing schemes of work in different schools. The early years of my teaching career were dominated by phenomenological thinking and preparing students for public examinations based on biblical studies. The battle was to define and defend the importance of RE in the school curriculum when, for increasing numbers, the topic of religion was irrelevant or aroused hostility, with a rise of agnosticism and secularism and fall in Christian observance during the 1970s to 80s. I defended RE's relevance by emphasising its value in understanding humanity, mostly through introducing the study of six major world religions into syllabuses dominated by Christianity. The majority of the classes I taught at this time were mostly mono-cultural white, with pupils who were outsiders to at least five of the major six religions being taught. There was little criticality about my representation of these world religions, as it was dominated by teaching general descriptions, often from an underlying but unspecified norm of Christian understanding. Studying biblical texts for public examinations was, for me, an edited recapitulation of my university studies, using biblical scholarship to engage with religious texts. This approach has subsequently been challenged in my thinking, partly because of my own experiences of it during this period and particularly because of increased engagement with a variety of approaches now used in religious education (Jackson, 1997, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2014; Grimmitt, 2000; Ipgrave, 2001, 2002, 2005; Keast, 2007; Gearon, 2013; Barnes, 2014).

The contested nature and purpose of RE which I experienced during this period is indicated in this quotation from *The Fourth R*, which reflects my own understandings and approach in justifying and teaching about world religions as a beginning teacher:

It would be idle to pretend that... teachers and pupils brought up in a Judaeo-Christian religious environment could be expected to aim at or attain a depth of insight into the attitudes, beliefs and religious experiences which lie behind the religions of the Middle and Far East... Even so, acquaintance with some basic facts about other men's religions and the social and cultural contexts within which they find expression can itself broaden not only the pupils' religious but also their international understanding. (Ramsey, 1970, 121)

The quotation identifies the relationship between knowledge and attitudes which might result from increased education about religions. It reflects a commonly-held view that learning information about religions in itself is beneficial, not only in religious terms but also as a way of understanding the world. This debate has re-emerged more recently as an area of dispute about the purposes of RE. Is RE intended to assist pupils in understanding the role of religion in today's world, and thereby potentially contribute to community or social cohesion, or has this purpose muddled the waters around RE, redirecting teachers' and pupils' attention away from studying the nature of religion and religions and instead become an opportunity to teach about social interaction and integration (DCSF, 2007; Wright, 2010; Gearon, 2010; Jackson, Iprgrave, Hayward, Hopkins, Fancourt, Robbins, Francis and McKenna, 2010; Conroy, Lundie, Davis, Baumfield, Barnes, Gallagher, Lowden, Bourque, and Wenell, 2013; Chater and Erricker, 2013)? This will be returned to in a later discussion on community cohesion.

My experiences of teaching RE were interrupted when I taught English in a German international school during 1984-5. This opportunity engendered a broader questioning of what the aims and nature of education might be. I could no longer assume pupil fluency in a national language and culture. I also could no longer assume, unquestioned, English attitudes and practices in my teaching and I gained insight into the experience of being a cultural outsider, albeit while still operating in an educational environment which espoused Western European and American values. During this period I began to reconsider my attitudes to educational purpose and content, pedagogical understandings and assessment in the light of my new educational context. I also developed new understandings of cultural dissonance and questioned long-held but only partially interrogated understandings of national identity. This period is relevant to later understandings of cultural positioning in my research and teaching.

Returning to RE teaching in England in 1993, I found a very different educational situation from the one I had left ten years earlier. In 1988, the National Curriculum (NC) had been introduced, creating a new, national, standardised content for pupils and a division of subjects between the Core Subjects, (English, Mathematics and Science) and Foundation Subjects. RE

had become part of the Basic Curriculum, while retaining local determinations. Teachers were perceived as more directly accountable for the content of their teaching and attainment of their pupils (Copley, 1997). A combative political discourse had developed, which at times stereotyped the Department of Education and Science as ‘self-righteously socialist’ (Margaret Thatcher, quoted in Copley 1997, 120). Following union strikes in the 1980s, certain sections of the media and some political parties typified teachers as left-wing and anti-enterprise; creating a more overtly political and defensive teaching persona for me than I had been conscious of before. In addition, arrangements for school inspection were altered from local to national and the *Education (Schools) Act* 1992 established the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), changing the process and status of inspection. Returning to this politicised environment meant I consciously experienced a change in pupils’ and parents’ attitudes to teachers and recognised a requirement to defend my own teaching beliefs and practices, as well as adapt to a new inspection regime.

In the aftermath of the National Curriculum debate and the *Education Reform Act* (1988), the problematic settlement for RE in 1988 further politicised the RE debate (Hull 1989; Copley, 1997; Hull, 1998). Key issues of RE content and relevance to late 20th century society in Britain continued to be debated within the RE community, in particular an interrogation of phenomenological approaches and the introduction of ‘Learning from Religion’, (Grimmitt 1987, 2000; SCAA, 1994a, 1994b; Hull, 1998). During the 1990s I taught RE part-time to Years 5-8 and was invited by a local university to teach primary student teachers about RE. This challenged me to develop understanding of both primary pupils and student teachers and reinvigorated my engagement with the subject’s identity and content, leading to studying for an MA in Religious Education with the University of Warwick (2000-2003) and a move from school to university teaching.

My university teaching has been focused in ITE in the areas of RE and I also lead interdisciplinary humanities and inclusive practices modules and am a link tutor for School Experience (SE). Involvement in this wider preparation of student teachers has impacted profoundly on my understanding of the role of RE in primary ITE, as in primary education the teacher’s role is much more than subject focused. Enquiry into the place and potential of RE in more general primary ITE has therefore become a later focus of this research. Above all, primary education focuses on the holistic development of children, from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) through to Key Stage 2, so there are valuable connections to be made between and beyond subject disciplines in areas such as personal, social and emotional



development (QCA, 2004; DCSF, 2008b, 2010). It has also enabled me to grow the influence of RE across ITE programmes I teach on, through visits to places of worship and through seizing opportunities to interrogate cultural and religious understanding among students and tutors.

My involvement in the University of Warwick REDCo community of practice has been central to my understanding of RE and so should be indicated here as part of my personal development. I joined the community from its beginnings in 2006 and continued until its end in 2009 (Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady, 2009). The community of practice enabled me to focus on the specific context of RE for non-specialist student teachers in primary ITE in relation to the Interpretive Approach (Jackson, 1997). This experience influenced much of the research reported in this thesis and will be discussed at greater length in the Key Issues and Findings chapters.

## **1.2 Religious Education in an English context**

In 2002, Lynn Broadbent identified justifications for RE at the time she was writing, of which three have continuing relevance:

the nature of multifaith Britain,...,the significant reporting of religious issues in the media, ... and the evidence of religious or spiritual experience within the population at large.  
(Broadbent, 2002, 19)

These identify that the role of RE in education should be central in developing pupils' understanding of their world and giving them knowledge, skills and understanding to participate both as individuals and as members of their society as children and adults.

Religion is part of human experience and children need to have access to RE to understand the role of religion in the world.

In 2004, the QCA defined the content of RE as 'learn[ing] from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions while exploring their own beliefs and questions of meaning' (QCA, 2004, 7). This statement identified the subject area which most pupils and their parents and carers would recognise as the subject they have or had at school. It showed an important development in that not only religious but non-religious worldviews could be examined, to reflect the realities of modern English life. RE included learning about religion or religions (Teece, 2010), but, although a recent and major development in the representation of religions had been the recognition that presentation of religion in many syllabuses did not reflect the reality of the practice of religions in the world today, many Agreed Syllabuses

continued to present learning about religions systematically, encouraging a view of them as reified traditions, even when recognising diversity within them. (Jackson, 1997; Nesbitt, 2004, Revell, 2008; Jackson *et al.*, 2010; Enfield SACRE, 2012; Woodhead and Catto, 2012).

Beyond learning about religion, the QCA quotation includes ‘exploring [pupils’] own beliefs and questions of meaning.’ (QCA, 2004,7). RE’s sphere of enquiry included:

Personal reflection, spiritual development... the influence of religions on individuals, communities and cultures,... pupils’...sense of identity and belonging,...a pluralistic society and global community, ....develop[ing] respect for and sensitivity to others...’ (QCA, 2004, 7)

This quotation indicates the growing complexity of RE at a particular historical moment. By this date RE had gained two Attainment Targets, ‘Learning about Religion’ and ‘Learning from Religion’ (Grimmitt, 1987). Both are echoed in the quotation above. Religions are seen as more complex and the details indicate the continuing recognition that learning about religion in itself is not enough; good RE requires the learner to interrogate his/her own understandings in the light of the religions and world-views they have studied. There is further recognition of the role of RE, in provoking

challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human. (QCA, 2004, 7)

and indicating the philosophical and ethical dimension which RE includes, reflected in GCSE and A level examination syllabuses.( EdExcel, 2012,1; AQA, 2016).

Further changes since have included new understandings of the role of religion and culture in society, reassessment of the role of community and communities in national and global affairs (DfES, 2007) and a reshaping of the content of RE in establishing and developing concepts of national identity, community and social cohesion and most recently combatting extremism. (Revell,2008, 2012; Grimmitt, 2010; Conroy, 2011; Conroy *et al.*, 2013; Chater and Erricker, 2013; Watson and Thompson, 2014). So what is the nature of RE in relation to politics and society?

### **A legal and political overview**

In the *Education Act 1944*, RE, or Religious Instruction as it was then called, was seen as central to the provision of all children’s education. This Act codified the legal position of RE in the curriculum and still influences the provision of RE today through the requirement of

locally agreed syllabuses, the right of parents to withdraw their children from acts of worship and/or religious instruction and the expectation of a daily act of collective worship in schools (Copley, 1997; Hull, 1998; Bastide, 2007; Jackson, 2013). The result of the *Education Act 1944* and subsequent education acts has been to set RE apart, and, in the longer term, has created a situation where the subject is perceived very differently from others and is also isolated through its legal position (Chater, 2011; Conroy, 2011).

The *Education Reform Act 1988*, (ERA) focused the content and outcomes of a state educational service in a centralising move through establishing the National Curriculum (NC), although it maintained RE as part of the basic curriculum (Gillard, 2011). In terms of content, unlike other curriculum subjects which were given national curricula, the 1988 Act reinforced the role of Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) to run Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) which were to provide syllabuses for maintained schools in their area. Each RE syllabus should

reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. (HMSO, 1988, ch.40 Vol.1/2, section 8, 6)

The impact of the ERA was to marginalise RE in schools for not being in the NC. It did not receive the attention of government or publishers in creating a clear status or good resources and there were serious implications in the provision for collective worship (DfE, 1994) which created alarm among head teachers in multicultural schools. I was involved in running in-service training (INSET) in RE for Haringey LEA during the 1990s and this was the biggest issue which teachers wanted resolving. They felt compromised when asked to promote Christianity in schools with a large population of ‘non-Christian’ children and were intellectually and morally uncomfortable if expected to offer a ‘fudge’ of Christian teachings wrapped up in community cohesion or personal morality messages. A number of head teachers discussed determinations with me to regularise their school’s position because of this discomfort

- Need to check about determinations with Haringey
- Risk that schools will be caught out in inspections for non-compliance - Heads are worried.
- How can inclusion be maintained in assemblies? Concern this will result in a multicultural fudge which short-changes the children. Discuss with Chris xxx (co-lecturer) so he is aware of the issue.

(planning note, September 1997).

Subsequent Education Acts, such as those in 1996 and in 2011, have maintained the position set out in 1988, but the development of new types of school, including academies and free schools and a rise in the number of faith schools has increased the complexity of the delivery of RE. Perceptions of the importance of RE have changed from the assumption of Christian belief being a major part of English society and hence being part of the educational curriculum, to a new emphasis on needing to understand the nature and impact of different religions to understand world events, (Revell, 2008; Watson and Thompson, 2014), Student teachers need to know about these developments, which concurrently reinforces their belief that RE is different and difficult.

By 2009 there were some moves towards integrating RE with foundation subjects, building on developments and successes in the *Early Year Foundation Stage curriculum* (DCSF, 2008a) and encouraged by the *Independent Primary Review* (DCSF, 2009). The Review was one of two developments intended to move the primary curriculum to a model with strands rather than defined subjects (DCSF, 2009; Alexander, 2010a). But in 2010, the change of government heralded a return to a standards and subjects agenda, ignoring the research and recommendations of the *Cambridge Primary Review* and the *Independent Primary Review* (DCSF, 2009; QCA/DCSF, 2009; Alexander, 2010a; Clarke and Woodhead, 2015). Despite his assurance that RE would be ‘addressed’ in the National Curriculum review, by the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, RE was not included, despite strong representation, thereby demonstrating that at times of curriculum upheaval, RE is particularly vulnerable because of its unique but also isolated position (APPG, 2013; REC, 2013). In many ways Baker’s desire in 1988 to regulate RE rather than reform it was repeated by the Coalition government in the review of the curriculum 2010 to 2013. In reality, though, relying on the law proved no substitute for supporting RE, and Michael Gove admitted to a Church of England seminar

I think that RE has suffered as a result of my belief that the protection of it was sufficient and I don’t think that I’ve done enough.

Michael Gove (BBC, 2013)

The continuing erosion and confusion about the nature of RE was highlighted in 2011, when James Conroy listed educational areas in which RE has been drawn, including:

citizenship education, multicultural awareness, spiritual and social cohesion,  
philosophical understanding, moral development and understanding heritage  
(Conroy, 2011, 8).

This indicates the over-complex identity RE has developed during the last twenty years in response to demands placed on it from political and social pressures (Conroy, 2011; Conroy *et al.*, 2013; Chater and Erricker, 2013; Clarke and Woodhead, 2015; Dinham and Shaw, 2015).

Political activity in RE re-energised through an All Party Parliamentary Group to investigate the problems RE was facing as a subject in schools and its role in community cohesion (APPG, 2013; Miller, 2014a and b). In response to the deterioration in the status and provision of RE, the Religious Education community funded *A Review of Religious Education in England* (REC, 2013), which created a new focus on the aims of RE and its content. The Review drew on the *Non-Statutory Framework* of 2004, but it is clear that by 2013 the complexity of RE has further developed and the RE community, as represented in the document, recommended a re-evaluation of the core knowledge and understanding which the subject encompasses (REC, 2013, 52).

Further thinking about the relationship between RE, politics and schools was considered in a recent publication, *A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools*, which calls for a reconsideration of RE, Collective Worship and the Law (Clarke and Woodhead, 2015). There has also been a recent report, *RE for REal*, which calls for a ‘statutory National Framework for Religion and Belief Learning’, which would be applicable to all schools and would require a change in the law. This framework would include examination of the nature of RE and its relationship to the rest of the curriculum, especially in relation to Citizenship and SMSC. The report also calls for continued funding for initial teacher education (ITE) of subject specialists and improved CPD for non-specialists (Dinham and Shaw, 2015, 1).

More recently, a new Commission on Religious Education was launched in 2016 to:

make wide-ranging recommendations to overhaul religious education in schools. The Commission has been asked to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for religious education in all primary schools, secondary schools and further education colleges in England.

(Commission on Religious Education press release, 8 July, 2016)

In 2017 it published an interim report, calling for:

1. A national entitlement for RE
2. More accountability in schools for the provision and quality of RE
3. A national plan to improve teaching and learning in RE
4. A renewed and expanded role for SACREs

Evidently, there is currently considerable momentum in the RE community to create change which will improve the status and delivery of the subject, even if the legal status remains unchanged.

### **Global events and their influence on RE**

Knowing about religions and cultures has become increasingly important as global events require a greater understanding of diversity. There has been an increasing amount of media attention and rapid reporting through improved communications, so global events are viewed almost instantaneously through the internet or television. Events, such as the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon, (11/9/2001), the London bombings (7/7/2005), the Arab Spring (2010/12) and the attacks in Syria and Iraq by ISIS (2014-16) have created different perceptions of religions' place in the world, in particular moving faith from a personal to a public agenda, often influenced by the complex relationships between terrorism waged in the name of a religion, countries and the global community.

This is not the place to undertake detailed analysis of global events over the last twenty years, but they are a back-drop to what is currently happening in RE, in that current affairs can impact very quickly on primary classrooms, especially through children's, teachers' and parents' attitudes in response to specific global events. Current conflicts in a variety of regions such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and North Africa have created new discourses about religious identity both between groups within a religion and between believers of different religions and non-believers. They have raised the profile of migration, for both economic and personal safety reasons, which has challenges for many communities in England, Europe, the Middle East and across the world. In Britain issues such as the rise and impact of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the rejection of Britain's membership of the European Union, migrations across the Mediterranean Sea, which have intensified in 2015/6 leading to divisions within Europe about how to receive large numbers of migrants, and backlash reactions of racist and right-wing parties are current examples of the tensions between national identity and international responsibility which are creating a new background to RE in the classroom. Some sections of the British media report the arrival of migrants with vocabulary such as 'illegal' and 'bogus' to describe status, and 'flood', 'flow' and 'wave' to describe migration patterns, (Allen and Blinder, 2013). Such discourses can be reflected in children's attitudes to each other in the classroom, often parroting attitudes heard at home

(Smith, 2005). In schools' curricula RE has, among other subjects such as PSHE and Citizenship, become tasked with community cohesion and more recently the 'Prevent' extremism agenda in response to these events (Jackson, 2014).

Developing understanding of different religions and cultures in Britain is therefore part of an educational focus informed by differing societal opinions, and increasingly politically framed by assertions of British identity and reference to Fundamental British Values, a term in itself problematic for many teachers (Elton-Chalcraft, Lander, Revell, Warner and Whitworth, 2017). Realisation of the changing relationship between Britain and the rest of the world, both European and global, requires reinterpreting Britain's role in arenas such as Europe, the Middle East, the Commonwealth and the United Nations. Both religion and culture have become perceptively more complex areas, sometimes overlapping and at other times divergent. Both have become increasingly multi-faceted, with recognition of multi-identities for both individuals and for groups. Religion itself is being conceptualised in different ways, for example as propositional belief, tradition, or as an existential experience, which complicates the ways that teachers may both represent and come face-to-face with religious expression in their classrooms (Miller, 2014a, 1).

Although, as non-specialists, primary student teachers do not have time to interrogate different conceptual approaches to religions during their training in RE and humanities subjects, they need to be aware of current events and attitudes, the complexity of their own identities and those of the children they teach and the communities they come from, if they are to be able to flexibly and creatively respond to the diversity which exists in their classrooms and promote the school values of inclusivity which they seek to foster.

### **Multicultural and Intercultural Education**

During the 1990s-2000s a long-running debate between multicultural education and antiracist education also influenced the development of RE (Jackson, 2004). Multi-cultural education had developed in Europe and America as a response to a growing awareness and expression of the complexity of cultures recognised and practised among different groups. It was hoped that through cross-cultural understanding and developing respect, pupils would come to know and appreciate cultures other than their own. The tensions between multicultural and anti-racism education in Britain arose because of antiracist concerns that multiculturalist education unnecessarily reified cultures and inadvertently emphasized difference (Troyna, 1993). Troyna's phrase 'saris, samosas and steel bands' was frequently cited as evidence of

the superficiality of a multicultural approach and an attitude towards ‘other’ cultures which saw them as ‘different’ (Jackson 2005,5). RE had initially been positioned in the multicultural ‘camp’, but needed to respond to the power relations which antiracists had identified and the dangers of stereotyping religion which could occur through lack of knowledge about diversity within religions and lack of understanding of religious expression. In order to move beyond the debate, a different label of ‘intercultural education’ was used by some academics and the Council of Europe to indicate a new way forward, which acknowledged the concerns of the antiracist lobby (Nesbitt, 2004; Keast, 2007; Council of Europe, 2008; Cante, 2011; Barrett, 2013; Jackson, 2014).

In 2005 Jackson wrote for a European audience:

responses to civil unrest in Britain, reactions to international terrorism in Europe and attempts to apply codes of human rights globally, all invite forms of intercultural education that take full account of issues of religious diversity, promote communication and dialogue between pupils from different backgrounds, and foster social cohesion through the encouragement of tolerance, understanding and respect between peoples.

(Jackson, 2005, 7)

This set out an agenda for a new direction, which built on both earlier approaches. Diversity was understood as complex and communities were not stereotyped through cultural expression such as music or literature. This approach encouraged teachers to consider their own meta-narratives in relationship to their teaching (Cooling, 2002; Everington, 2014). It strengthened links between RE and sociological and anthropological thought, encouraged by Jackson and the University of Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU), explored through an Interpretive Approach. This approach is central to my developing understanding of RE in primary schools. It also has links with a developing community cohesion agenda (Jackson, 2004).

### **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development**

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development has been established as part of the curriculum for all maintained schools since the Education Act 1988. It was confirmed in the *Education (Schools) Act 1992* where the Chief Inspector’s general duty to report on pupils’ SMSC development was stated. Guidance on ‘spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and of society’ was published as part of the new inspection framework (NCC, 1993). This was reiterated in the School Inspections Act, 1996 and the duty on schools



to promote pupils' SMSC development was repeated in the Education Act, 2002. Most recently SMSC has become a renewed focus for Ofsted inspections, with new guidelines published (Ofsted, 2014, 2015). The most recent guidance at date of writing recognises:

- Moral development through 'ability to recognise the difference between right and wrong... understand the consequences of their behaviours and actions... and appreciate the viewpoints of others'
- Social development as 'a range of social skills in different contexts...a willingness to participate in a variety of communities... [and] acceptance and engagement with the fundamental British Values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs'
- Cultural development as 'understanding and appreciation of the wide range of cultural influences that have shaped their own heritage and that of others...understanding and appreciation of the range of different cultures within school...as an essential element of their preparation for life in modern Britain...interest in exploring, improving understanding of and showing respect for different faiths and cultural diversity'  
(Ofsted, 2015, 36-37)

These three areas have all received amendments from previous advice which emphasise tolerance and respect for diversity in Britain, including diversity expressed through faith and religion and embedded reference to fundamental British values. The relevance of SMSC in education is linked to values education and the preparation of pupils for adult engagement with society. Of the four areas, spiritual development has proved most complex to define, and its relationship to religion has continued to be ambiguous. Working definitions from Ofsted (HMSO,1999,71) recognised the religious dimension for spirituality for those who belong to a religious tradition as well as applying the concept of spirituality to those without a religious tradition, stating

Spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal experience which are of enduring worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to experience, valuing a non-material dimension to life and intimations of an enduring reality. 'Spiritual' is not synonymous with 'religious'; all areas of the curriculum may contribute to pupils' spiritual development.  
(HMSO, 1994, 86, cited in Ofsted , 2004, 8).

More recently Ofsted have updated their definition of pupils' spiritual development to:

- ability to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values

- sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them
- use of imagination and creativity in their learning
- willingness to reflect on their experiences. (Ofsted, 2015, 36)

This maintains the dual understanding seen previously and emphasises an increasing theme of the diversity of Britain seen in the three previous moral, social and cultural definitions of the 2015 guidance.

## **Community and Social Cohesion**

A series of Reports and Acts led to the establishment of ‘community cohesion’ as part of schools’ agenda during the 2000-2010s. It is important to consider this cohesion in relationship to RE and ITE, because the communities discussed were frequently those of black and Asian minority ethnic groups, with identities immersed in culture and religion. The *Race Relations [Amendment] Act, 2000* required schools and other institutions to identify and act upon incidents of racism, address discrimination and promote racial equality (Osler, 2009).

Events through the 2000s, such as the London Bombings in 2005, brought new dimensions to debates about cohesion and racism as the nature of England’s multiculturalism was questioned and debates about national identity fostered (Osler, 2009). *The Education and Inspections Act 2006*, required schools to ‘promote community cohesion’, as schools were identified as being well placed to educate children and young people about modern British society, with the aim of promoting understanding of diversity and good community relations. This led to *Guidance on the Duty to Promote Community Cohesion* (DCSF, 2007). One of its recommendations was for schools to take up the *Non-Statutory Framework for Religious Education* (QCA, 2004) because of its good practice in diversity education (DfES, 2007,10).

Curriculum subjects most widely used to promote community cohesion are: RE, Citizenship Education, Geography, English, Art, Music, History, Drama and MFL (DfE, 2011a, 56); 90% of primary schools reported using RE -the highest percentage of any subjects (DfE, 2011a, 60). This clearly demonstrates that whatever the RE community thinks are the purposes of the subject, RE is seen by primary schools as an important conduit for transmitting strong messages about community cohesion in school.

A change of government meant that the findings of the report were not fully embraced by the Coalition Government of 2010-15, but interest in RE as a means to community cohesion

persisted, as evidenced by the second All Party Parliamentary Group enquiry on RE in 2013 to 2014. Evidence was heard from a range of contributors and, in her report Joyce Miller, who chaired the sessions, commented

The APPG inquiry identified a number of criteria that need to be met if RE is to be effective, not least in relation to community relations. Reference was made to breadth and balance in the curriculum; the need to increase teachers' knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews; an increase in religious literacy, language and concepts, for both teachers and pupils, to enable depth of understanding and informed engagement with religions and beliefs. (Miller, 2014a, 7)

These comments highlight the need for teachers to feel more confident about their representation of communities, including religious communities, in the classroom, both those represented in the school and those who are not. There is a strong connection between the representation of religions in the Interpretive Approach, which focuses on individuals and groups as well as traditions (Jackson, 1997), and the recognition for teaching about multiple identities (Miller, 2014b) and group belonging. As a school is a type of community, it can be a powerful example of community relations for children, parents and carers. Schools can also provide an example of how to handle complex and controversial issues which can arise among different communities represented in its population. An example of advice given on these issues is the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in public schools* (OSCE/ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), 2007).

### **Fundamental British Values and the Prevent strategy**

*The Prevent Strategy* was first introduced as a counter-terrorism measure in 2008 (HM Government, 2008). This demonstrated the relatively rapid movements in political thinking at this time, responding to perceptions of terrorist threats heightened by 9/11 and the London Bombings of 2005. Fear of increasing radicalisation among British-born Muslims changed the discourse from one of community cohesion to preventing radicalisation.

A report was commissioned by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families in October 2009, which was published by the re-named Department for Education after the change of government in 2010. It investigated the implementation of a statutory duty to promote community cohesion in schools and local authorities and its relation to the non-statutory *Prevent* agenda guidance (DfE, 2011a). Amongst its findings, schools were reported to 'view "community cohesion" in terms of citizenship, multiculturalism, faith and

race/ethnicity’ (DfE, 2011a, 8). This signalled a joining of two agendas, a community relations agenda with which schools felt more confident in delivering as part of their ethos and participation with families, and the *Prevent* strategy, a more politicised agenda, which for many schools was seen as challenging the relationship they have with their pupils (NUT, 2015; Adams, 2016).

In 2005, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, spoke at the Labour Party National Conference in response to the 7/7 London Bombings. In his speech he outlined a list of values ‘of freedom, tolerance and respect for others’ (BBC, 2005) which he believed to be central to a co-ordinated response to an on-going terrorist threat. By the following year this list had evolved:

But when it comes to our essential values – belief in democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, equal treatment for all, respect for this country and its shared heritage- then that is where we come together, it is what we hold in common; it is what gives us the right to call ourselves British. (Woodward, reporting Blair, 2006)

The language of ‘fundamental British values’ was originally seen in *The Prevent Strategy*, (H.M. Government, 2011) when discussing extremism (Maylor, 2012). This strategy replaced that of the previous government and continued to identify that the terrorist ‘threat comes not just from foreign nationals but also from terrorists born and bred in Britain’ (H.M. Government, 2011, 1). In an attempt to prevent radicalism growing among young people who may feel disenfranchised and alienated from mainstream society, both *Prevent* strategies require schools to monitor and report any indications of interest in terrorism. However, attempts to create a nationalist discourse in schools have been met with very mixed reactions, as many teachers struggle to identify what fundamental British values might be (Elton-Chalcraft, Lander, Revell, Warner and Whitworth, 2013; McCully and Clarke, 2016; Elton-Chalcraft *et al.*, 2017) and feel uncomfortable with promoting any sense of patriotism through their teaching (Jerome and Clemitshaw, 2012). The concern for the RE subject community is that the subject will be expected to include *Prevent* material in its teaching and espouse a particular attitude to values. The Religious Education Council developed a programme called *Resilience (England): A REC project*, to respond to the need to engage RE in secondary schools to address the issues of radicalisation (REC, 2010). This was a comprehensive attempt to combine access to a wide range of different organisations who were all working in this field and,

recognise the central role which RE teachers have in strengthening policy and provision for equipping students for tackling contentious issues in the curriculum, especially the religious roots of violent extremism.

(Circular email to AULRE members, 20 October, 2011)

Community cohesion has more recently also been referred to as ‘social cohesion and good community relations’ (Miller, 2014b, 1), reflecting the semantically contested nature of this area of study. Community cohesion can be interpreted as

‘having a racialised agenda and by others as part of *Prevent*, it is sometimes differentiated from social cohesion by its lack of focus on social and income inequality’ (Miller, 2014b, 1).

In part these new names arise from the joining of community cohesion to the *Prevent* agenda as linked in the DfE (2011a) publication. The new inspection regime in 2015 reinforced links between Fundamental British Values, SMSC and the *Prevent* agenda. SMSC is the oldest of these and has established educational understandings with RE. Connection to Fundamental British Values and the *Prevent* agenda, in contrast, are relatively recent developments (DfE, 2014b; DfE, 2015b), which gained prominence in ITE terms because of the inclusion in the *Teacher Standards* of the requirement to

not undermin[e] fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

(DfE, 2011b, 6)

Combining the three areas together creates huge tensions for RE, partly because of the *de facto* connection between some religious beliefs and terrorist activity, particularly in some areas of political rhetoric and the media, and because of the expectation placed on RE to include discussion of this material.

*A Review of Religious Education in England* (REC, 2013) recognised RE’s impact on wider school issues. It listed:

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, community cohesion... the *Respect for All* initiative, critical thinking and citizenship’

(REC, 2013, 29).

Since the Review was published in 2013, the *Prevent* agenda can also be added to this list. In many ways this demonstrates the strengths of RE, in its capacity to handle controversial issues, and its place, embedded in the school curriculum. It also, however, underlines its

weaknesses: a loss of subject identity and diversion to teach material which is not part of its subject brief, because there are so many claims on the subject. In a world where subjects are being redefined, particularly through subject content, RE can struggle with its identity.

### **Primary Religious Education in an English context**

RE has struggled over its content and status in both primary and secondary schools in the last ten years, in particular as a result of political and educational directives. The particular problems suffered by RE generally and in particular secondary RE have been stated in a range of documents (Chater and Erricker, 2013; APPG, 2013; Dinham and Shaw, 2015).

Although the crisis in primary RE has been less identified, the fallout has also been considerable. In many ways it is masked by the generalist nature of primary teacher education, as teachers are expected to teach all the subjects in the basic and National Curriculum and individual non-core subjects have received less attention because of the constant emphasis on Mathematics and Literacy. Quietly, however, the position of RE in a considerable number of primary schools has deteriorated. Statistics published in the APPG report (2013) show that in only 44% of primary schools is RE taught by the class teacher, while in 23% some classes are taught by a teaching assistant (TA), as reported by Ofsted (2010). Although Ofsted recognised that, when carefully managed, this could have a positive impact on pupils' learning, the concern was that the status of RE was reduced by not being taught by a teacher and issues such as teachers' subject knowledge and confidence were not addressed as a whole-school issue. It was clear from the APPG report (2013) that RE was suffering in primary schools as a result of erosion of time, confusion about purpose and loss of status in the curriculum, compounded by lack of training in both ITE and CPD, resulting in a lack of knowledge about the subject and a resultant loss of confidence in teaching what is seen by many teachers as a sensitive and challenging subject (McCreery, Palmer and Voiels, 2008).

Understanding these historical and contemporary political influences on educational policy, and in particular on RE, are important for the specialist RE teacher, who should have knowledge of the unique history and position of RE in the English curriculum (Barnes, Wright and Brandom, 2008). Primary student teachers, the majority of whom are products of the National Curriculum, are enculturated in a politicised perception of education which has become increasingly strident in recent years. They do not necessarily understand the underlying educational issues, especially in relation to the RE they received in school. In

order that primary student teachers can interrogate their role as teachers of RE, it is important that they have some knowledge of the factors which influenced the RE they were taught. The issues of content and parental rights are as resonant today as debates continue about the nurture of children in religious belief and the use of the exclusion clause (NATRE, 2016). It is important that student teachers are given insight into RE's current difficult position, in part because they are engaged in delivering the 'muddle' of policy and practice we now have (Dinham and Shaw, 2015, 2).

Recent projects to improve primary RE are underway in schools, including: *Religious Education Quality Mark* (REC, nd); *Transforming Primary RE*; (Culham St. Gabriel Trust, 2015), *Learn, Teach, Lead*, (nd); *Understanding Christianity* (The Church of England Education Office, 2016); *The Re-searchers Approach*, (Freathy, Freathy, Doney, Walshe and Teece, (2015), but although primary generalist ITE training has been identified as needing improvement (Ofsted, 2013; APPG, 2013) there appears to be little national momentum, unless the forthcoming REC Commission can generate a more determined effort.

### **1.3 Initial Teacher Education in an English context**

During the last thirty years, there have been considerable changes to initial teacher education (ITE). These have included changes to philosophy, political positioning, practical application, content and assessment through the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) ( DfEE, 1998; DfES, 2002; TDA, 2007, 2008, 2009; DfE, 2010). Before the establishment of the Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) in 1984, the concept of accreditation had been largely absent from ITE. CATE examined the content of teacher education courses, links between subject knowledge acquisition and the needs of schools and introduced the requirement that potential student teachers had relevant and recent experience (McNamara, Webb and Brundrett, 2010). Minimum requirements for days in school were introduced and, in 1992, school-based training and partnership was further emphasised. Primary Circular 14/93 increased time for undergraduate students in school from 100 to 120 days, putting pressure on teaching time in HEIs and leading to the intensification of courses where 'key aspects of curricular and professional development were squeezed out' (Furlong *et al.*, 2000, cited in McNamara, Webb and Brundrett, 2010, 653). This marked an increased politicisation of teacher education as there was more centralisation and emphasis on control of teachers' training. In 1995 CATE was replaced by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), which implemented the 1994 Education Act, cementing the change of emphasis from

education to teacher training. This marked a philosophical change which still resonates today through discussions about the ‘craft’ of teaching and teachers as ‘apprentices’ (DfE, 2010).

Changes since 1997 include the introduction of teacher standards and further prescription of the length and content of courses. The length of time in schools changed from 24 weeks for a 3 year undergraduate programme and 18 weeks for a PGCE programme (DfES/TTA, 2003) to 120 days (DfE, 2015a). There has been an increasing emphasis on the core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science and student teachers have been required to take Skills Tests, initially in English, Mathematics and ICT, but more recently slimmed down to English and Mathematics, as well as passing English, Mathematics and Science at Grade C or above at GSCE or equivalent. A further requirement is that student teachers now need to have passed the skills tests before joining a course, rather than taking the tests during their training. This has the potential of narrowing the pool of students who might feel able to enter the profession, despite the increased number of routes via Teach First, School Direct, Troops for Teachers and other more recent developments, such as the opportunity for academies to join independent and free schools in employing ‘non-qualified’ teachers (DfE, 2012).

One impact of these changes has been to focus attention on qualifications and the core subjects, while eroding the time and emphasis given to foundation subjects in the curriculum (Boyle and Bragg, 2006). The safeguard for RE was the legal requirement to teach it, but it was clear from the report *Religious Education Teaching and Training in England: current provision and future improvement* (REC, 2007a), that there was under-provision for RE in ITE courses, especially where there was no specialist RE cohort. Increasingly there were calls for student teachers to be shown good-quality practice when out on placement, (REC, 2007b), however there were no guarantees that schools were well-placed to show good practice and most placement offices were not engaged in identifying good RE as a criterion for selecting a school in which to place a student

We have problems of placement experiences- finding a model of good RE...  
Mentor support for their planning can be poor- a lot of students report that their mentor, [when they’ve gone to them for help] in RE, has said, ‘I don’t really know, I can’t help you with that.’ Yet they can help with English and Maths or the majority of anything else, but they feel inadequate to support them ...

(Edited transcript from the *Primary RE in ITE, AULRE* seminar,  
Middlesex University, 17 November, 2012).

An impact of this sustained focus on the core subjects was the rise of part-time lecturers in ITE, as individuals were brought in to deliver short courses on foundation subjects



(McNamara, Webb and Brundrett, 2010). This further marginalised foundation subjects as their voice was weakened or absent in academic meetings about course design and ITE providers felt compelled to focus their detailed provision on the core subjects as government demands for literacy and other testing increased (DfE, 2015a).

### **Approaches to Initial Teacher Education**

‘Primary teachers now, far from being seen as child-minders with little expertise, are viewed as professional learning enablers, possessing an incredibly complex range of skills which must be employed in collaboration with vision and imagination.’

(Arthur, Grainger and Wray, 2006, 1)

The training of primary teachers has been revised and refined over a succession of iterations of teaching standards (DfEE, 1998; DfES/TTA 2003; TDA, 2007; and DfE, 2011b). This has led to a more centralised focus on professionalism, which has caused discussions about the expectations and training of student teachers, in particular their autonomy and creativity.

For most beginning teachers, [the] learning ... craft elements looms pretty large in their early experiences of teaching. Learning to talk to large groups of pupils in an authoritative yet approachable way, learning to ask questions and respond to answers, learning to plan appropriate activities for all the pupils in a class, learning how to write informative reports to parents about the progress of offspring- all of these have a significant craft element in them, and many beginning teachers see their principal aim in the first few years of teaching as mastering these skills.... Yet this is not all there is to successful primary teaching, nor to the process of becoming a successful primary teacher.

(Arthur, Grainger and Wray, 2006, 2)

Arthur, Grainger and Wray raise an important issue here. How much do teachers need to replicate ‘good practice’ which they might learn in part through imitation, and how much do they need to understand underlying philosophies and theories to make informed choices to improve their teaching? I argue that the recognition of craft (*techne*) is only part of a considerably more complex understanding of the purpose and process of teaching, which is underpinned by different forms of knowledge. Teachers need to extend beyond *techne* to the professional and creative dimensions of teaching, which include elements of knowledge (*episteme*) and practical wisdom (*phronesis*).

What makes good teaching? There is much debate about the relationship between knowledge of subject, knowledge of pedagogy and the personal relationship between pupils and their teachers, as can be seen in these quotations:

Pupils expect teachers to teach. They expect lucid exposition, the clear statement of problems and guidance in their solution. Personal qualities of kindness, sympathy and

patience are secondary, appreciated by pupils if they make the teacher more effective in carrying out his primary intellectual task. (Musgrove and Taylor 1969, 17)

Richards, in contrast, emphasises the importance of pedagogical subject knowledge:

This crucially important area involves knowing how to make the knowledge, skills and understandings of subjects accessible and meaningful to children- how best to represent particular ideas; what illustrations to use; what demonstrations or experiments to employ; what stories to tell; what examples to draw on; what kind of explanations to offer; how to relate what needs to be taught to children's experiences and interests. (Richards, 2006, 17)

and socialisation:

It is ...very significant today – partly as a result of our increasingly complex, rich multi-cultural society, where the values of tolerance and respect for others are so much needed and where they can be fostered and reinforced from the minute children enter school. Contemporary children need to find a place- a comfortable, affirming place- in our society. (Richards, 2006, 18)

All three elements, subject knowledge, knowledge of pedagogy and social interaction between teachers and their pupils are all required and student teachers need support and affirmation, as much as pupils do, in learning how to be professional teachers.

This research has been conducted in the framework of the British government's expectations of ITE set down by first the TDA (2007) and subsequently the DfE (2011b). The majority of my teacher education experience has been influenced by the educational vision of the Labour Government which developed policies of wider university access, Ethnic Minority Achievement, *Every Child Matters*, (HM Treasury, 2003) and *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003). The attitude towards the teacher as professional has been one of inspection and criticism, leading to increased pressure from school league tables, SATs, increased Ofsted intervention and, in 2009, a reconsideration of the primary curriculum under Sir Jim Rose. This curriculum review encouraged a wider debate about the nature and purpose of primary education, which became increasingly independent through the influence of *Children, their World, their Education* (Alexander, 2010a), published after the *Rose Review* (DCSF, 2009). The perpetual changes encouraged by that government through a variety of agencies and an increasing number of teachers in the system who themselves had been educated under the National Curriculum created debates about the success and breadth of the primary curriculum.

I see the process of preparing student teachers to become teachers as teacher education, not training. Training implies a transmission model which for me does not articulate the complex

process involved in becoming a teacher. Crowe and Berry (2007), citing among other Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf and Wubbels (2001), offer a fuller understanding of the experience, as a

process of cognitive and affective development and change as prospective teachers learn to negotiate their developing identities as teachers

(Crowe and Berry, 2007, 30).

The arrival of a new government in 2010 changed the political face of education and ITE again. Primary schools, many of whom had adapted their teaching to consider cross-curricular approaches and in a large number of cases were moving to a theme or topic approach for at least some of their teaching, were faced with a scrapping of the *Rose Review* recommendations and an announcement of a new curriculum review which at first was to report in 2012, but was then delayed in implementation until 2014. Many primary schools in our partnership decided to continue with the topic approach, which we also echoed in our training.

Schools uncertain about cross-curricular models. Discussion with Sally at xxx School about their Learning Journey. They've decided to continue until new directives appear. Prefer it because they think it follows pupils' learning patterns.

(fieldnote on cross-curricular teaching, 20 September, 2009)

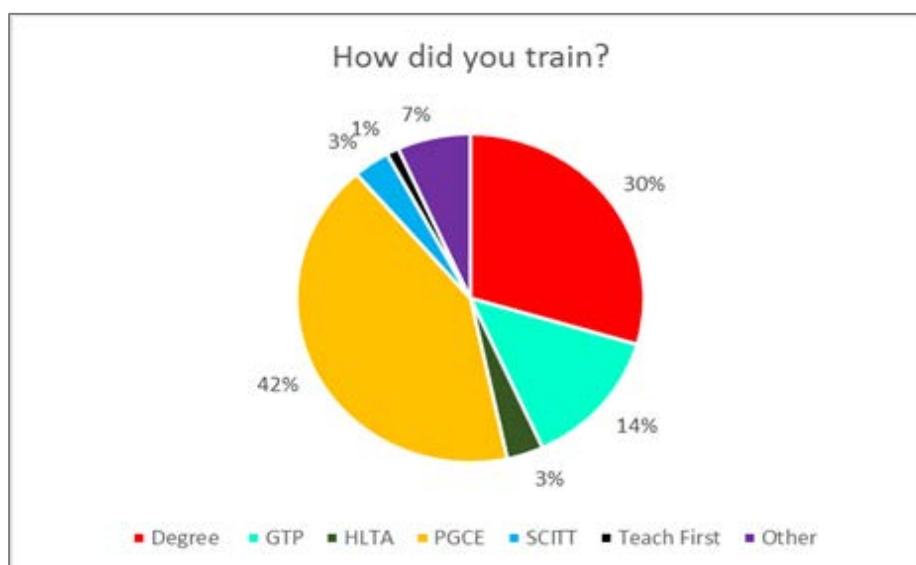
## **1.4 Primary RE in ITE in a national context**

This section explores the current situation in preparing primary student teachers to teach RE in England, and identifies a range of pressures on the subject, including the effect of more recent changes in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and changes to the primary curriculum.

The majority of primary Religious Education in ITE is currently taught in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as part of the subject provision necessary for a student teacher who is training to teach a primary-aged class. RE is a statutory subject, in that it should be available to all pupils in state schools in accordance with the law. Teachers have the right to withdraw from teaching RE once they are teachers, but the usual provision in HEIs is that student teachers can be trained to teach RE, even if they chose to withdraw from teaching it once they have qualified.

There is a considerable variety in ITE courses available in England. Students can study for a BA Hons. degree in primary education with Qualified Teacher Status over 3-4 years, a post-

graduate certificate in education based in HEIs (PGCE) or in schools (SCITTs), until recently be trained in school on a registered or graduate teaching programme (RTP, GTP) or more currently through Teach First and School Direct (SD) routes. The recent NATRE survey (NATRE, 2016) records their latest data on training routes, which demonstrate that PGCE, followed by BA QTS degrees make up 72% of respondents' training routes:



*Figure 1.3 - How did you train? Responses to the NATRE Survey into Primary RE - Autumn 2016. (NATRE, 2016, 9)*

Most students study RE as part of these routes, which divide into either generalist primary education routes, (where students do not have a specialism, or have a specialism other than RE) or study a specialist RE route. Students studying on specialist RE routes are a small proportion of Primary ITE students, so the majority of RE teaching is for generalists and non-RE specialists. RE training is delivered in a number of different ways: through subject specific modules, through cross-curricular or grouped subject modules such as the humanities, through individual days of training and during school-based training.

There is no agreed core of material taught on all ITE routes, partly because of the range of provision on different courses. Some university ITE courses offer a specialism in RE, but there is some evidence that some specialisms are being cut (private email correspondence collected as evidence for the APPG hearing, 2013). The main focus for publishers in RE is teaching in secondary schools, where a lot of pedagogical research has taken place, (Barnes, Wright and Brandom, 2008; Jackson *et al.*, 2010) but there are some key texts which are used by Primary RE lecturers to support their courses, as evidenced by conversations with fellow

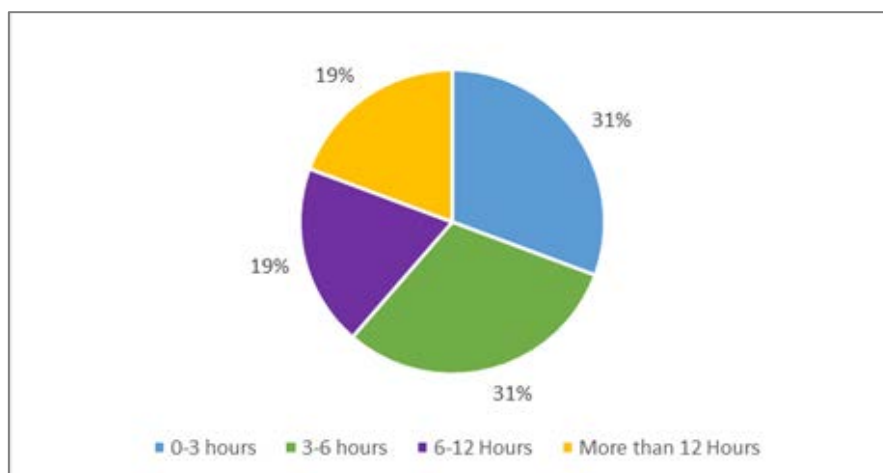
lecturers in 2012, for example Rivett, (2007); McCreery, Palmer and Voiels, (2008); Erricker, Lowndes and Bellchambers, (2011); Teece (2012); Lowndes ( 2012a, 2012b).

Decisions about pedagogy vary considerably, and in some courses pedagogy is not focused on because of the length of time available. There is for example a considerable difference between how pedagogy can be developed with student teachers specialising in Primary RE, who have multiple modules during their training, and what is available to generalist students or those with another subject specialisation (field notes: *Primary RE in ITE* AULRE seminar, Middlesex University, 17 November, 2012).

Discussions with other Primary RE lecturers, (*Primary RE in ITE*, AULRE seminar Middlesex University, 17 November 2012; *Shaping the Future of Primary Religious Education*, Conference, Middlesex University, 30 November 2013; External Examiner conversations 2010 to 2016) indicate that they do not focus specifically on one pedagogical approach, but encourage students to reflect on activities to create a practical approach to teaching RE. It is very dependent on the time available for training. It is easier to focus on one approach in geographical locations which are served by large Local Authorities with a strong agreed syllabus, but this is much more complex in London. A number of lecturers, for example, have commented on *Living Difference*, the conceptual approach used in the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus, particularly referring to the work of Judith Lowndes and Clive Erricker. (Wedell, 2009; Erricker, Lowndes and Bellchambers, 2011; Lowndes, 2012a and b). This has been adopted by a number of other Local Authorities, including Westminster in 2006 and Hammersmith and Fulham in 2014. Wedell (2009) comments on the enthusiasm teachers have for the approach, although it is clear from participants' comments that it takes time to establish in schools. A new approach is also proposed in *The RE-searchers: A New Approach to Religious Education in Primary Schools* (Freathy *et al.*, 2015). This uses four approaches to religious enquiry: phenomenology, critical realism, ethnography and experiential learning (Freathy and Freathy, 2013, 162). Both these approaches are valuable, but in non-specialist ITE RE training, they are very complex to adopt in the timeframe available and are better suited to whole-school development which can be embedded over time.

Each ITE route plans its provision separately, so there are no norms in terms of time, content or experience. Information from individual institutions and data collection by NATRE (2013,

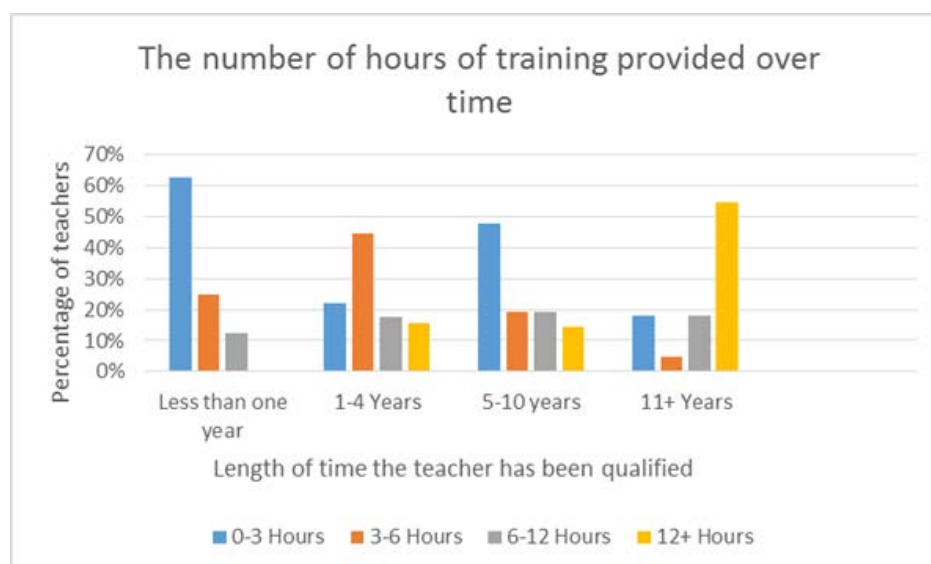
2016) and for the APPG Inquiry (2013), indicate the wide range of time allocated by different training providers. The most recent data are provided below:



*Figure 1.4 - 'How many hours of training have you received?' Responses to the NATRE Survey into Primary RE- Autumn 2016 (NATRE, 2016, 9)*

In addition, the 2013 NATRE survey indicated that 24% of teachers received no RE training on their ITE course (NATRE, 2013, 7) which is masked by the 0-3 hours indicated on this graph.

The NATRE survey for 2106 also indicates the decline in time spent on ITE training in RE over the last eleven years.



*Figure 1.5 - The number of hours of training provided to teachers over an eleven year period (NATRE, 2016, 9)*

The graph shows a dramatic fall from over 50% of respondents trained over eleven years ago receiving over eleven hours of training to 0% of NQTs receiving over twelve hours in 2015. The group identified as receiving training between 2005/6-2010/11 shows the most dramatic reversal, from under 20% receiving 0-3 hours to nearly 50% recording 0-3 hours training and a dramatic drop in terms of twelve hours or more from over 50% to about 15%.

The majority of teachers who completed the survey had been teaching 1- 4 years and around 45% of these had only received 3-6 hours of training (NATRE, 2016, 9). This is particularly concerning because there are specialist Primary RE students being trained at a number of HEIs, but either they are not responding to the NATRE survey or there has been a drop in hours on some of these courses as well. I am aware of courses which devote more than twelve hours to specialist RE through my External Examiner experience, but it is difficult to establish the number of specialist courses, as they are not indicated on all HEI primary ITE course websites, and some are not secure as HEIs can discontinue them from year to year (private email correspondence collected as evidence for APPG/REC Report, 2013).

In 2007, the REC published *A National Strategy for RE: Proposals by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales* (REC, 2007a) and *Religious Education Teaching and Training in England: current provision and future improvement*, (REC, 2007b) in which they identified the following strategies to address weaknesses in Primary ITE in RE.

Providers should ensure that at programme level students should be given opportunities to work with experienced teachers to support experience in school, including specific opportunities for teaching RE when on school-based training, input from specialist staff and programmed time on each training programme, and that Ofsted should inspect the RE provision of ITE providers (2007b,50) and there should be further development of specialist courses on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes/courses (REC, 2007b, 31).

In addition they also recommended that the TDA should include specific references in their guidance for Qualified Teacher Status which required student teachers to reflect on their own beliefs and values and how these may influence their teaching and identify opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In terms of content primary trainees should:

Understand the main features and purpose of the Non-Statutory National Framework for RE and its position within the current statutory arrangements for RE including agreed and aided school syllabuses.

(REC, 2007a, 6)

In June the same year Ofsted observed that:

Primary initial teacher training (ITT) courses provide very little training about teaching RE; later professional development does not compensate for this. Primary teachers' lack of secure subject knowledge is a key factor limiting the amount of good and outstanding teaching in RE (Ofsted, 2007, 7)

And recommended that providers of ITT should, 'strengthen the arrangements for selecting and training RE subject mentors to ensure that trainees receive high quality training.' (Ofsted, 2007, 9)

This is good advice, but in 2007 the REC reported that 'very few providers have full-time tutors in primary RE' (REC, 2007a, 6), which makes it particularly challenging for RE to be embedded in ITE courses. The issue continues. When collecting data for the APPG/REC report in 2013 and *Shaping the Future of Primary RE* Conference at Middlesex University (2013), it proved difficult to identify and contact RE lecturers on Primary ITE routes, with some HEI administrators unable to name an RE lecturer or commenting that they used teachers from school to provide training on their courses. (Data collection notes, 2013). This demonstrates the continuing weak status in ITE provision.

Despite clear recommendations in *Transforming Religious Education*, which repeated concerns over the 'lack of knowledge and confidence among teachers to teach high quality RE lessons' (Ofsted, 2010,4), there has been little evidence of policy developments in RE in ITE courses in HEIs on a national scale, whatever might be occurring in individual HEIs. *Religious Education, Realising the Potential* (Ofsted, 2013), *An Analysis of the Provision for RE in Primary Schools*, (NATRE, 2013), *A Review of Religious Education in England* (REC, 2013) and *An Analysis of the Provision for RE in Primary Schools*, (NATRE, 2016) continue to report very similar problems in ITE. More concerted efforts have been dependent on a range of factors such as the promotion of Agreed Syllabuses by local Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) or Continuing Professional Development offered by the NATRE or charities such as the Culham St. Gabriel Trust, Westhill Trust, Jerusalem Trust or Farmington Institute, but these are generally directed at teachers in schools, rather than ITE.

Teachers receiving so little or no training in RE weakens the subject's status and student teachers' understanding of the importance of RE in children's education. Poor opportunities to observe and teach RE while on placement, compounded by inadequate provision of RE in



many primary schools, (Ofsted, 2013), and weaknesses in students' own RE education (Ofsted, 2013; Dinham and Shaw, 2015) means that primary RE has suffered considerably in the last ten years. It is difficult to introduce the subject and develop student teachers' understanding or discuss appropriate approaches when lecturers' subject teaching time is limited, or in some cases non-existent and this inevitably influences new teachers' engagement, attitudes and understandings of the subject. I outlined the cumulative effect of these pressures at the APPG enquiry in 2013. Each issue endangers the subject, but their damaging combination needs to be recognised in effectively removing so many children's experience of high-quality RE in primary schools.

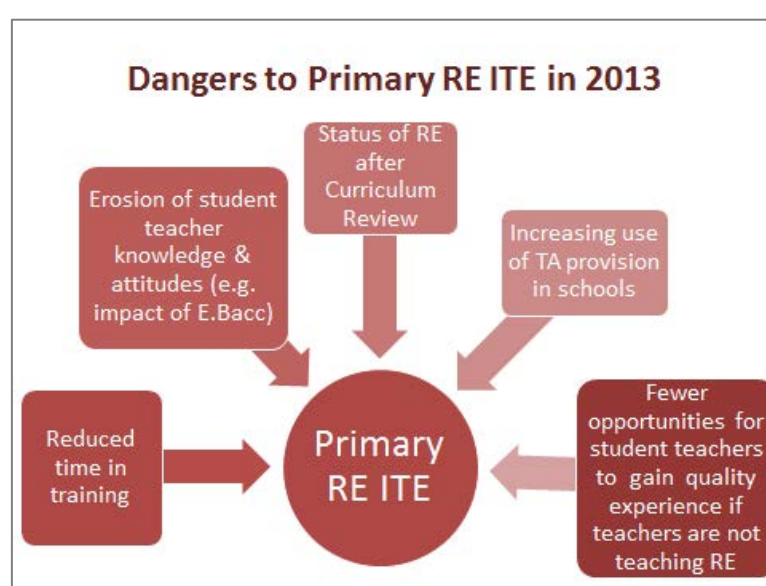


Figure 1.6 - Slide presented at the APPG evidence hearing, House of Commons, 16 January, 2013 (Whitworth and Walters, 2013)

In the latest APPG Report published in 2016:

The APPG recommends that the Department for Education should ensure that all primary ITT programmes contain a suitable proportion of time dedicated to RE. Steps should be taken to ensure that all RE trainees can benefit from high quality subject experts informed by up-to date pedagogical research. (APPG, 2016, 16)

These weaknesses have therefore been recognised repeatedly, but with little national effect. It is to be hoped that the call for improved primary ITE in RE in the *Commission on Religious Education Interim Report*, which recognises the same issues of time, status and school practices, will be now heeded, as they also call for improved opportunities in training, including a recommendation of twelve hours training for all students (REC, 2017).

### Primary RE in Schools

RE is taught in differing ways in school, including: cross-curricular topics or themes, a single lesson a week provided by either the class teacher, another teacher, religious leader or a Teaching Assistant or as a short focus over a day, week or term, as a discrete subject. This variety impacts on the experience of student teachers on teaching practice. Further variation includes the nature of the school the student is placed in for their school-based teaching experience. Most primary schools are non-religious state schools, many of which are still attached to local authorities. However, many are Anglican, some are Catholic and some are run by other faiths. RE is therefore taught according to a wide range of Agreed Syllabuses which complicates ITE training. Over the last three years there has also been the development of primary academies, some of which have religious and some non-religious backgrounds. This means there is considerable variety in the range of experience a student teacher might have in school. Some students may request not to be placed in a faith-based school, and some may prefer this; however, in reality, the pressures of finding school placements for student teachers in some areas of the country are such that the religious identity of a school is much less significant than their current Ofsted rating.

Primary Specialists in RE receive additional time on their training routes to focus on the complexities of RE and its identity, however, generalist primary teachers may receive very little support in RE training and yet are expected to deliver good-quality RE in their classrooms (REC, 2007a, 2007b; Ofsted, 2010; NATRE, 2013, 2016). The list quoted from Conroy (2011) above indicates the complex discussions around the identity of RE in the wider curriculum. How can student teachers be encouraged to understand the complexities around a mutating subject during their initial teacher education? I would argue that any ITE course in RE needs specialist lecturers who are aware of the historical background and debates in RE, and who can position RE in the complex narrative of primary education as it evolves. They need a practical approach to RE, which both engages pupils in the nature of the subject, and also enables student teachers to identify aspects of the curriculum which they understand sufficiently to teach.

My students have inherited from their own schooling an understanding of RE through systematic approaches to religion which have dominated local agreed syllabuses. They inevitably, despite the development of both Attainment Targets, see RE as something subject knowledge driven and judged by measurable outcomes. Knowledge has, for them, become the arbiter of good education, so they see RE as dominated by knowing about religions, an approach which can reify religions by creating summaries of knowledge which can be

regurgitated for examinations. They frequently do not have qualifications in Religious Studies (NATRE, 2016), so the issue of subject knowledge is continuous in their training. Although the numbers of pupils taking short and long course Religious Education GCSEs grew over the 1990s (Dinham and Shaw, 2015) and the numbers taking AS and A level also rose, there is still a significant number who had weak RE in schools which did not deepen their religious literacy and which ceased by Sixth Form (Ofsted, 2010, 2013; NATRE, 2013).

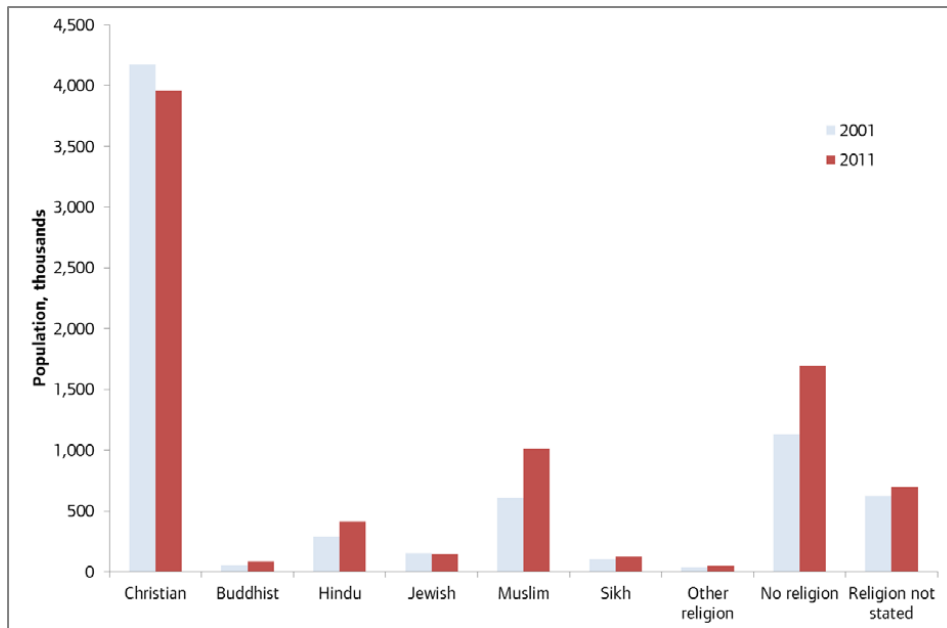
### **1.5 A specific HEI context**

The university in which this study is based is situated in London, a vast and multicultural ‘super-diverse’ city, (Vertovec, 2007), which has a mixture of diversities, including religious, cultural, social, economic and political. London is the most socially diverse and highly populated area in the United Kingdom, and is one of the most ethnically diverse in the world (Greater London Authority, 2013). All ethnic descriptive terms used in this section are following the conventions of the 2011 Census.

Between 2001-2011, the population of London grew by over one million to over eight million and the specifics of change are reflected in 2011 Census data on the range and size of different ethnic communities. A significant change in the ten year period is the rise in the proportion of non-UK-born residents in London, which rose from 27.1% to 36.7% (GLA, 2013,5). The rise in the number of young adults (aged 20-40) in London is also significant. In this age group, the proportions of young white-British and Black/African/Caribbean/Black British ethnicity has fallen, but non-British White, mixed ethnicity, Asian and British Asian and Arab populations aged between 20-40 have risen (GLA, 2013, 13-19).

#### **Links between ethnicity and religion**

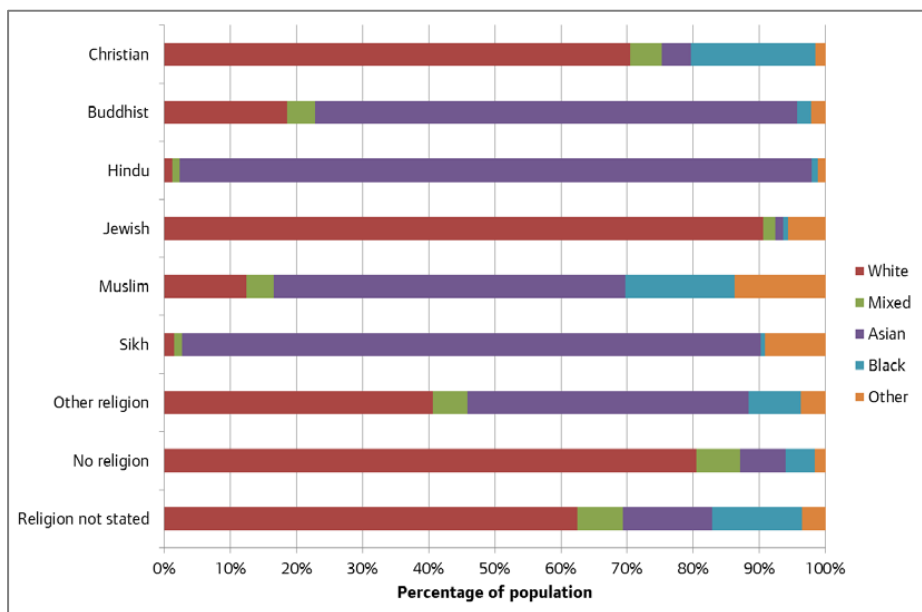
Census data also gives insight into religious observation in London (GLA, 2013, 20-24). Although this is an optional question on the census, introduced in 2001, it gives some insight into religious identities in the London area, although this varies from borough to borough.



*Figure 1.7 - Religious group populations in London, 2001 and 2011 (from GLA, 2013, 8). Sources: 2001 table KS007, 2011 table KS209EW*

This shows an increase in the number of people identifying themselves as having no religion, a fall in the numbers identifying as Christian and a rise in those identifying as Muslim and Hindu.

The next graph indicates the ethnic make-up of those religious groups in 2011, demonstrating the complexities of religious, cultural and ethnic identity:



*Figure 1.8 - Ethnic make-up of religious groups in London, 2011 GLA (2013, 33) Source: 2011 table DC2201EW*

Students who attend ITE courses at the university are mostly drawn from London and the Home Counties, so the census information indicates trends in population change which impact on both the identity and ethnic make-up of the student cohorts we have and the pupil cohorts we are training them to teach.

## **Urban Education**

Most of the partnership primary schools working with the university are in Enfield, Barnet and Haringey. In the 2011 census, Enfield was ranked 8<sup>th</sup> among London boroughs in terms of total Black population and 15<sup>th</sup> in terms of Asian population; Barnet, 14<sup>th</sup> in terms of Black population and 10<sup>th</sup> in terms of Asian population, and Haringey, 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> respectively (ONS, 2012). The 2011 census of England also revealed that among children under the age of five in 2011, 6% had a mixed-ethnic background, more than belonged to any other minority group, indicating that the idea of distinct ethnic communities needs re-consideration as family identities change (Arweck and Nesbitt, 2011; The Economist, 2014). The census information above does not provide information on patterns of Eastern European migration in London, but in 2014 between 4-5% of migrants in London were reported to be born in Poland (The Migration Observatory, 2016, 7). Within these boroughs there are wide-ranging differences in terms of local language and ethnicity, as well as changing family identities.

To educate student teachers to work in London's schools means realistically recognising the challenges of urban schooling in terms of socio-economic disadvantage and potential educational disadvantage (Pratt-Adams, Maguire and Burn, 2010). Yet London is also the site of 'The London Challenge', one of the most successful projects to improve children's experiences in education there has been in the last twenty years (Kidson and Norris, 2014). Of particular relevance to RE are the range of cultures and religions identifiable in the capital. Only 45% of Londoners describe themselves as 'white British', and 37% of the population was born outside the UK (BBC, 2012). The result is a cosmopolitan global city where over 300 languages are spoken in its schools (London Councils, 2016) and many cultures are reflected in its schools and public life.

The university offers traditional undergraduate and post-graduate routes of teacher training to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS); BA(QTS) in primary and PGCE in primary and secondary education. In addition Registered and Graduate Teacher Programmes were developed (RTP and GTP) from 2001. These became School Direct Programmes in Primary and Secondary education from 2013. ITE students come from all over Britain, but the majority come from

the North London area for a variety of cultural, financial and personal reasons. (Student comments at interview). Over the last four years the percentage of Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) students at the university has risen substantially faster than the increase in BAME students recruited nationally.

| Year                 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 | 2015/16       |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------------|
| BAME students        | 9%      | 10%     | 10%     | Not published |
| Sector average %     |         |         |         |               |
| Middlesex University | 22%     | 26%     | 36%     | 44%           |
| BAME students %      |         |         |         |               |

*Figure 1.9 - University percentage of BAME students in Primary ITE 2012-2016 against the national average (Middlesex University, 2016).*

*Sector average figures 2013/14 and 2014/15 taken from National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) Providers' Analysis website (2015).*

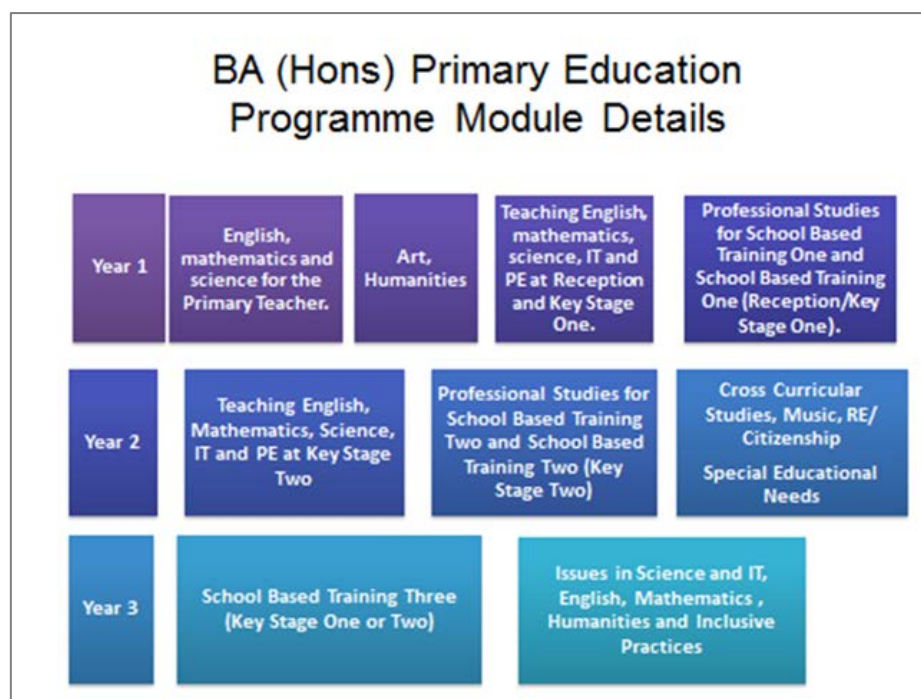
Over two hundred primary schools used for school experience are linked to the university through a partnership scheme. These are located in a wide catchment area from Hertfordshire in the north, Essex in the east, Brent in the west and areas south of the River Thames. This wide catchment area means that students can be placed in rural, or semi-rural, as well as urban and suburban areas and a number of different local authorities oversee the schools used for school-based training. This means that as well as being placed in multicultural areas, some students are placed in what Gaine describes of 'white areas' of limited visible diversity (Gaine, 2005). He divides these into 'adjacent, peripheral and isolated' and all three descriptions could be applied to the range of our partnership schools. Even in multicultural London there are pockets of mono-cultural schools where students gain only limited experience of teaching in a multicultural school. This impacts on students' experience of multicultural teaching, and for RE means that they can meet a range of Local Authority Agreed Syllabuses, as well as faith schools' and church schools' syllabuses.

## **1.6 Primary RE in a specific HEI ITE context**

This section provides an introduction to the RE teaching which forms the basis of my research. These details are provided because the specificity of the courses has impacted on my understanding of how to pragmatically develop RE with each different ITE training route. My university teaching includes RE modules for Primary BA (QTS) and PGCE student teachers, Graduate Teacher Programme trainees (GTP), and School Direct, giving me experience of different routes provided or delivered in partnership with a Higher Education

Institution (HEI). Each module is delivered at different stages of the student teachers' training, so a brief outline follows.

### Background to the modules



*Figure 1.10 - The BA programme module details showing the structure of the three year programme*

The undergraduates study for three years for a non-specialist qualification of BA Hons. with Qualified Teacher Status. They are taught RE in the second half of their second year, after they had had two periods of SE, amounting to eighteen weeks in school, concurrent with other modules, including cross-curricular studies and special educational needs (see diagram above). This module has been the focus of my research. It is specifically taught in the second year so that students have had experience of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 and can use that experience to develop their understanding of pedagogy, both within RE and more generally in the primary curriculum. As I also teach Year 1 humanities and am a link tutor for the BA, PGCE and School Direct programmes, these students will have worked with me on other modules and I will have observed some of them in school, which validates my comments on classroom learning and teaching directly and ensures students recognise I have a wider role in their training. We have a shared and sustained enterprise and regularly discuss professional practice and values, while recognising the different roles we inhabit during the students' training (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). The BA students' two school experiences in different schools and key stages prior to the module enable them to develop a more evolved

understanding of teaching and learning and the role of teachers in school. They will have written plans and taught differentiated lessons, in both core and foundation subjects. The current teaching standards (DfE, 2011b) are used throughout both school experiences to monitor and improve their teaching and the language of the standards will have been considered by them and their mentors in assessing their progress. It is recognition of their developing teaching personae and *phronesis* about teaching which they bring as a result of school experience, which has been an increasing focus of my research during the undergraduate RE sessions.

The module is organised into ninety minute sessions over five weeks. In addition the students also attend a Holocaust Memorial event in a synagogue and a visit to a *mandir* during the module. The module has an assignment which contributes to the students' overall degree classification. The general content is laid out here, but each year alterations and additions are made, in response to my research and student feedback.

| <b>Session<br/>(90 mins)</b> | <b>Brief outline of the session</b>  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Session 1</b>             | The aims of RE, Legislation, Agreed Syllabuses, REC non-statutory framework, Learning about religion- phenomenological approaches<br>Story- telling and pedagogy   |
| <b>Session 2</b>             | Artefacts and diversity within religions.<br>Teaching about Religion in the Home – socio-constructive learning<br>Pedagogies-Enquiry and Dialogue<br>The Interpretive Approach   |
| <b>Session 3</b>             | Teaching about Religion through Festivals<br>Practical activities encouraging reflection on different pedagogies<br>Cross-curricular approaches<br>Supporting diversity in the classroom   |
| <b>Session 4</b>             | Spirituality and Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education<br>Experiential learning<br>Developing pedagogies as a means of promoting good practice<br>Reflecting on the teacher, modelling learning in the classroom<br>Addressing teacher confidence in teaching RE |
| <b>Session 5</b>             | Assessment<br>Developing opportunities for and understanding of Inclusive Practices<br>Relating RE to the wider curriculum   |

*Figure 1.11 - Diagram of the BA Year 2 RE module*



The PGCE RE unit is similar to that of the BAs, but is delivered as part of a larger module in the Autumn Term, before the students have experience of SE. The module develops student understanding of learning and teaching theories generally, as well as providing subject-specific input to prepare for their first experiences of teaching on the course. The students also receive seven and a half hours of RE, also over five weeks. In addition they visit a local *mandir* as part of their first week's induction to the university and attend a Holocaust Memorial event at a local synagogue in the Spring Term. Their assessment is a general essay on the place of 'Talk' in the primary classroom across a range of subjects, to which RE contributes. Generally the students respond very positively to inclusive teaching throughout the module, which has resonance for many with their stated reasons for joining a PGCE course: that of 'making a difference to a child's life', 'creating opportunities for children' or a more general recognition that 'education is central to providing more life chances in children's lives' (Drawn from PGCE students' applications and interviews, 2010-15). Lack of school experience means there is a more general, philosophical and aspirational tone to some of the discussions, in comparison to those with BA and School Direct students, who have more extended experience in classrooms and therefore draw on that experience more practically to contextualise their understanding.

RE input on the School Direct programme is two sessions totalling three hours. The students also attend the Holocaust Memorial event with the PGCE students. Students on this route have had considerable experience of classroom management by the time their RE training is delivered, so the focus moves to providing higher-quality RE through experiencing and discussing a variety of pedagogies.

Since 2014, RE has also been taught in Year 3 of the undergraduate course, in an interdisciplinary module 'Investigating Humanities'. This has enabled the students to reconsider RE in the light of their third SE. Although this is a relatively new development, student assignments and post-course feedback are already beginning to indicate an increased willingness and understanding of how to include elements of RE in interdisciplinary planning, encouraging students to include RE in their classroom teaching and seeing it as part of a wider primary curriculum.

Since 2004 my employment as a permanent member of staff, instead of a visiting lecturer, has enabled the RE provision to become more embedded in the whole primary programme. This has been an important factor in improving the status of RE and developing cross-

curricular links with other areas. My involvement with other modules has enabled me to develop an understanding of cultural and religious identity as a consistent focus in the students' development as teachers. This has enabled me to conduct my research, for the most part, in uncontrived ways, as module development is on-going and the students are accustomed to processes of feedback and discussion (Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

## Chapter 2: Key Influences within the Research

This chapter considers three key ideas which have influenced my research and impacted on my own practice: the Interpretive Approach (Jackson, 1997), *phronesis* and exploring a pedagogy of teacher education.

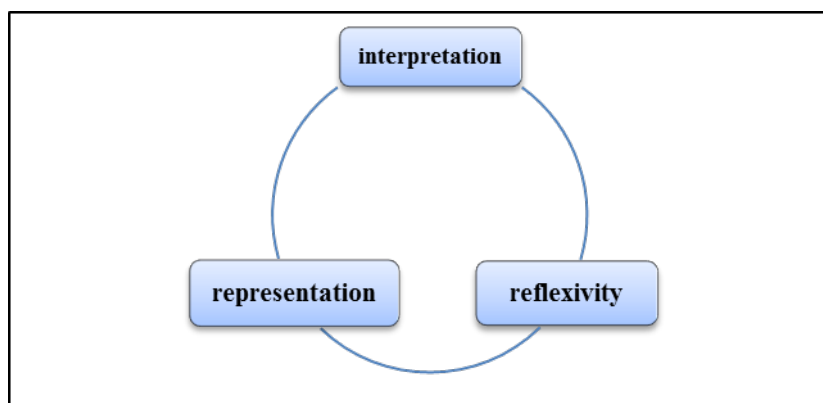
### 2.1 The Interpretive Approach

In *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach*, (1997), Robert Jackson sets out his arguments for developing RE using an ethnographic approach, developed with the University of Warwick's Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU). I was attracted to the approach because of its recognition of the complexities of lived faith today and the problems of representing religions in the classroom. I perceived it could engage children in studying religions through human interest and alter the presentation of religion in primary classrooms where children from different religious traditions, and none, can struggle to understand and contextualise their own knowledge of belief and practice, when taught RE which is based on generalised and often stereotypical descriptions of religions. Instead of employing generalised descriptions, which young children can struggle to engage with, here was a framework which recognised diversity positively and explained it through promoting children's interest in other people's experiences as well as their own. This resonated with my understanding of the socio-cultural way in which children learn, through discussing and contextualising their experiences with others and through their innate curiosity about other people. *The Warwick RE Project* developed materials for primary schools (Barrett, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c) in which pupils learn about the religious lives of other children. Each book, developed from ethnographic research into the lives of children, used three layers: the experience of a child nurtured in a religious family, the group in which the individual is nurtured and the religious tradition which underpins their beliefs and practices. I consider one of the particular strengths of these books is the integrity used in gathering the material for them, consulting with families and religious communities to ensure the material was appropriate and accurately recorded as well as accessible to young children (Jackson and McKenna, 2005).

Using the material in my own primary classroom had demonstrated the interest it could elicit from children and I considered this approach could have appeal for primary student teachers I was educating, particularly because of the multicultural cohorts of students and the intake of

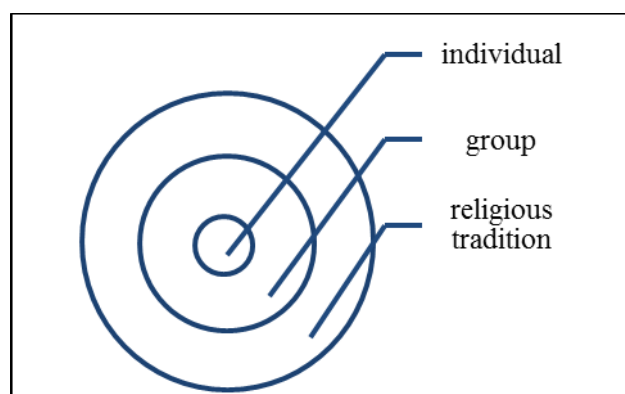
our partnership schools. Multicultural education had struggled to move beyond the tokenistic in the 1990s (Troyna, 1993; Said, 1995) and this approach deepened teachers' and pupils' understanding of religion and culture, by critically examining the educational material available, recognising its frequently reified and stereotypical presentation of the lives of others and providing a more nuanced and real-life alternative (Jackson, 1997, 2004).

The Interpretive Approach emerged from ethnographic studies into lived experiences of religion, which recognised the existence of layers of understanding which influence the lives of religious people. Jackson (1997) developed a representation of religions which is fluid and recognises diversity within religious traditions, by questioning the phenomenological approach, where religions can be examined through a theory of ideal types, which has strongly influenced RE thinking since the 1970s. Phenomenology requires the concept of *epoché* ('the distancing or putting into parentheses one's presuppositions') (Jackson, 1997, 21), as a methodological tool, but Jackson argues that the possibility of such a process is more of an intention than a reality and is not necessarily beneficial in the study of religions (Jackson, 1997). Rather than this approach, Jackson recommends viewing religions and their practices through the lens of interpretation, so that the ideas of the researcher and the ideas of the religion can be considered together, causing the researcher to both contextualise and question his/her understanding in the process of researching the unfamiliar. Jackson's concern was that the 'tendency to portray...religions as essentialised, homogenous belief systems' was distancing descriptions of religion from the reality of lived experience' (Jackson, 2009, 23). Such descriptions are frequently uncritically used to teach about religions, especially by non-specialists, but they can ignore the individual real-life experiences of children and their families and groups, which are where children learn their religious practices. Hearing one's religion described in terms which are alien to one's own understanding can be particularly confusing and disturbing for young pupils, as they can find it difficult to recognise their own experiences and contradict or recontextualise the teaching they are given.



*Figure 2,1 Diagrammatic representation of the three elements of the Interpretive Approach based on Jackson, 1997*

The Interpretive Approach has three key concepts, representation, interpretation and reflexivity which assist in teaching about religions. These create a cycle of learning which can begin with any of the three elements, and includes and revisits all of them to promote religious understanding. Representation of a religion is explored through three layers of understanding: individual, group and tradition.



*Fig. 2.2, Diagram presented by Judith Everington to introduce the Interpretive Approach at a PCfRE conference, University of Warwick, 1998*

Religions are represented through a tradition in which different groups situate their beliefs and practice. This recognises that both insiders and outsiders to a religion can recognise specific ideas and actions as belonging to a 'religion' such as Christianity or Islam, although Jackson also recognises (with Said, 1995) that the defining of a religion such as the Hindu Tradition can frequently be in a framework of Western description, rather than terms used by a believer. Representation includes recognising the diversity of different groups who share a religious identity, such as Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox for Christianity or Sunni and

Shia for Islam. The differences in practice between these groups are not seen as contradictory, but varied and these influence the individual believer who experiences the religious tradition through personal belief, group membership and through understanding of the tradition. This alleviates problems for a child in the class who hears different versions of their tradition described, because although groups may disagree about their practices, the aware teacher can explain that diversity exists and can be acknowledged positively.

Interpretation considers the problem of *epoché* by inviting comparisons and contrasts between the learners' understandings and the understandings of the people being studied. This emphasis on people rather than concepts is particularly helpful for primary children because it can create a dialogue about difference which is exploratory and promotes sensitivity and empathy based on human examples rather than concepts.

Reflexivity emerges from the process of interpretation as learners are encouraged to 'review their understanding of their *own* way of life' (Jackson, 2009, 25, emphasis in the original) and consider it in the light of the understandings they have gained from the religious study they have undertaken.

For Jackson, it is possible to start anywhere on the cycle, but with my students I begin with representation, because it is more inclusive and straightforward for them to identify groups within traditions first, using their general knowledge. It also immediately sensitises the students to the idea that religions are complex and need navigation, rather than being transmittable in reified form. Using the Interpretive Approach with students means recognising which elements will have immediate traction and which need introduction and future modification. Of the latter, an interesting example is the use of the terms 'insider' and 'outsider' (Jackson, 2004). I use these initially to identify religious positioning in broad brush strokes so that all students are able to see themselves in relation to religious traditions. As the sessions develop, these concepts are modified by recognising nuances of position, including family allegiances to more than one tradition (Arweck and Nesbitt, 2011), and cultural allegiance to a religious tradition rather than religious practice. Students can describe themselves as both insiders and outsiders, on the boundaries of religions, influenced by family practice but not necessarily believing, or expressing devotion in different ways from other family or group members. These descriptions indicate changing understandings and can involve personal revelations of identity, which are valued by other members of the seminar group because they indicate how complex religious and cultural identity can be and how it

can mutate. Although they do not necessarily initially envisage such conversations with their pupils, the exercise of considering representation is valuable because students recognise the cultural and religious navigation which individuals undertake to make sense of their world and the resonance with self-experience gives immediate and impactful illustrations of the diversity which they otherwise may not acknowledge. It also gives them growing confidence to ask and answer questions among themselves, because they are talking to individuals, rather than asking for a comprehensive response from a religious standpoint.

Intercultural education, (a term which came into currency to counteract some of the issues in multicultural education) has sought to forge a way forward by engaging with elements of antiracist education and developing cultural sensitivity (Cush, 1999; Nesbitt, 2004; Keast, 2007; Council of Europe, 2008; Cattle, 2011; Barrett, 2013). One of the barriers to developing intercultural RE is the influence of poorly applied phenomenology. Ground-breaking when it was developed from Smart (1971), phenomenology is a strong influence in contemporary RE, but is not always carefully applied in the representation of religions, and problems have arisen from uncritical interpretation of the Attainment Target, *Learning about Religions*, found in local Agreed Syllabuses. In seeking to teach about religions through consideration of different aspects or elements of each one, religions are frequently taught to primary children in ‘silos’, avoiding comparisons, using generalised descriptions and risking pupils’ disengagement through lack of interest or empathy and inaccuracies due to over-simplification. The concept of *epoché* has value for a philosophical scholar who is engaged in researching the nature of the religious, but when it is applied or assumed uncritically, it can become, for a teacher, an exercise in over-simplified neutrality, which risks distancing school pupils from engagement with religious material. If RE does not engage the learner in both fascination with and empathetic understanding of others in the process of learning, it runs a risk of irrelevance in the eyes of pupils who do not recognise resonance with their own lives. Although Jackson is relatively sympathetic to phenomenologists, he feels that in RE the approach has been hampered by ‘poorly designed materials which misapply principles from phenomenology’ (Jackson, 1997, 27). Too often primary teachers, insecure in their own subject knowledge, repeat stylised lessons, based on weak phenomenological thinking, about outward manifestations of religion, hoping that repeating information will suffice, and avoiding engagement with ‘difficult’ questions from their pupils (Ofsted, 2013).

## **Initial research into the Interpretive Approach with ITE students**

My use of the Interpretive Approach is based on my personal research experience of it in both my MA studies and from my REDCo experience. This research was conducted with the author of the approach as part of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and was related to a larger European project 'Religion in Education: a Contributor to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries? (REDCo)', which was a pan-European response to the European Commission (Framework 6) initiative into education for cultural and religious diversity in Europe (Jackson, Miedema, Weisse and Williaime, 2007; Council of Europe, 2008). This provided an opportunity to examine my modules through a more critical lens, use the Interpretive Approach and learn about and conduct action research as an iterative process.

The community was a mixed group of university lecturers, a local advisor and school teachers who had all studied and employed the Interpretive Approach as part of their professional work (Everington, 2009b). It gave me a forum to discuss my ideas and experiences with colleagues who shared my understanding of RE. The Interpretive Approach was already embedded in my own understanding and I wanted to introduce it more overtly to the students and see what impact it might have on their thinking.

The group drew on community of practice thinking (Wenger, 1998) to inform our research. We met regularly from 2006-9 and at the end of the project each researcher contributed a chapter to a publication in the REDCo series, about our experiences (Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady, 2009). Our research was based on three 'shared domains': RE, the Interpretive Approach and action research. During this time a methodology of action research was shared and evolved within the REDCo project by all members of the group (O'Grady, 2009).

Action research was chosen as the underlying methodology by the organisers of the community of practice because it was understood to have a breadth of approach appropriate for this project and had a synergy with the Interpretive Approach itself, through concepts of interpretation and reflexivity. One of the attractions of action research is its flexibility and appropriateness for developing research in the classroom (Cohen, *et al.*, 2000; O'Grady, 2009). The methodology could be used to bridge the gap between research and practice, which was appropriate for us all. The use of iterations by some of us allowed for flexibility and development and this methodology seemed particularly appropriate for my work because I was teaching different groups of undergraduate and post-graduate students each year and



already had a mechanism in place to gather student feedback. I was able to introduce the Interpretive Approach to two different cohorts of undergraduate students over two consecutive cycles and considered its impact, using the experience of the first cycle to inform the next (Whitworth, 2009, 115-6).

For my research I chose key research questions which related specifically to my research interest:

1. How could the Interpretive Approach be taught to non-specialist student teachers in a short course on religious education?
2. How might it contribute to student teachers' understanding of teaching primary religious education?
3. Could it assist student teachers in developing confidence in teaching religious education?

These questions all arose from my previous assessment of the RE module, issues surrounding the brevity of the course and developing understanding of student teacher confidence. They indicate the reasons for engaging in the research, even though at that stage I only had limited understanding of what action research as a methodology was. I was researching understandings of practice, both my own and the students', because I was constantly challenged in my teaching with the problem that what I was attempting to do with the students was change their understandings about RE. The Interpretive Approach underpinned my understanding and teaching, but I needed to consider if it could also assist the students in understanding more about RE through introducing them to the Approach. Was it too much to expect undergraduates to absorb the Approach and reflect on it in a short time frame?

This extract is taken from the chapter which reports my REDCo findings and indicates my engagement with the Interpretive Approach at that time:

Before teaching the first cycle I identified where the key elements in the interpretive approach could be developed within this [module] structure. I recognised that there was very limited opportunity to develop a complex understanding of the approach, but my intention was to create an experiential course through which students could acquire elementary understandings which they may build on further as their teaching careers progressed. If the students were to be able to use aspects of the interpretive approach in their own teaching there had to be opportunities for them to experience the impact of the approach on themselves. Each session operated on multiple levels – working with the students so that their own understanding developed and discussing how to develop pupils' understanding in the classroom situation.

(Whitworth, 2009, 116)

I concentrated on encouraging understanding of representation from the Approach and introduced opportunities for interpretation and reflexivity through encouraging student dialogue.

For the second cycle I focused on how students could become more familiar with the processes of the interpretive approach through closing the ‘theory-practice gap’ discussed by Loughran in his consideration of teacher education pedagogy (Loughran, 2006). Loughran considers how students need to be able to relate the theory they learn to the practice they experience through demonstrating their inter-relationship. The value of the theory, for the students, lay in its use in understanding the problems which arose within their experiences. Using this insight, the teaching activities I used in the first cycle were therefore repeated in the second, but the underlying interpretive elements were more explicitly explored to integrate the theory into the students’ understanding of pupils’ learning. The students were specifically encouraged to consider the different dynamics and learning strategies we were using during activities so they could reflect on appropriate ways of engaging pupils with reflection and interpretation. They used these occasions to identify their concerns and together we constructed scenarios and solutions which they could employ to develop pupils’ thinking.

(Whitworth, 2009, 122)

### **Criticisms of the Interpretive Approach**

There are criticisms of the Interpretive Approach, including those by Andrew Wright, who promotes religious literacy, using a critical realism approach to RE (Wright 2007, 2008). He argues that the emphasis on diversity within religions emphasised by the Approach misrepresents religions which perceive themselves as having clearly defined, coherent understandings and beliefs. He instead argues that religions should be represented as ‘substantial social facts’ which bind their adherents together with a sense of particular identity (Wright, 2008, 3). For Wright the contextual approach, which Jackson represents, reduces the reality of religions’ identities which each religion has developed over time and through shared history and therefore misrepresents the reality of religions for believers. Although Wright’s arguments raise important questions about the nature of religions and their representation, Jackson’s robust defence of the Interpretive Approach (Jackson, 2008) argues that the representation of religions, which Wright identifies as misleading, is not as focused on the diverse as Wright suggests. The wholeness of a religion is recognised within the term ‘tradition’ as it is used within the Approach.

My experience with many students has been that they operate on two levels of understanding of the term ‘religion’. Those who have a religious belief and/or practice are mostly aware of

both the main tradition and the group to which they belong. They are, however not necessarily informed about different groups in other religions and may not have considered teaching about different groups when teaching about their own tradition. They also have an awareness of general descriptions which are represented as their religion, but often identify groups within the tradition, as an important factor in their practice. Those without a religious belief may be aware of some differences, but do not have in-depth understanding unless experiences among their family or friends have indicated these to them. For most students, Christianity is the religion where they are more aware of different groups, although many identify Catholicism as a separate religion from Christianity. Awareness of Sunni and Shia groups is generally based on current affairs' reporting, but awareness of diversity in other religions is usually limited. At the beginning of the module almost all students consider that each religion can be taught as having one unified identity, even though they may be aware of differences through personal experience. The benefit of the Interpretive Approach is that not only does it prompt them to question their knowledge and assumptions about different religions, it also engages them in considering their own and their pupils' situations, and enables them to become sensitised to investigating about individuals' experiences, both to support individual pupils and to teach more inclusively.

The underlying premise on which Wright builds his arguments for religious literacy requires considerable understanding of religions themselves and are too distant from the knowledge bases and experiences of my students to introduce into the module. My own awareness of the current competing arguments about religious literacy underlie my teaching, but I need to be pragmatic in the choices of theory I explore with my students and recognise that primary RE requires a different basis from which to work from RE taught by specialist secondary teachers, who should provide more detailed subject knowledge, conceptual examples and support for pupils further developed in their intellectual thinking. A recent critique of religious literacy, which asks whose literacy is being promoted and how ownership is monitored (Blaylock, 2016) has caused me to reconsider the practicalities of primary RE subject knowledge in my teaching, and not be too ambitious in what I think can be covered at this stage of the students' ITE course. It seems more beneficial and achievable to use the time available with students to encourage them to begin to recognise their own positions *vis a vis* religions, assess their own subject knowledge needs and use the Interpretive Approach to help understand how they and their pupils could navigate between religious traditions.

A further criticism of the Interpretive Approach is found in the work of Liam Gearon, who is concerned that the emphasis on diversity within as well as among religions creates ‘too unnecessary a complexity’ (Gearon, 2013,130) and considers that teachers already include diversity in their teaching about different traditions. This has some resonance with Wright’s views, expressed above. He is concerned that the emphasis on diversity or ‘fuzziness’ of religious practice is not representative of the way religions portray themselves and even asserts he knows of ‘no conceivable instance where Christianity is ever taught without reference to denominational difference’ or the historical circumstances which brought about the differences (Gearon, 2013,130). This may be so when RE is taught by specialist teachers, but all too frequently, in both primary and secondary schools, where the subject is covered by non-specialists, I have seen teachers with no religious experience or from another religious traditions teaching Christianity, where knowledge of denominational difference is minimal or non-existent and subject content is derived from websites which may or may not be accurate or balanced about the Christian tradition. In addition, there is a considerable amount of teaching about religions other than Christianity which lacks knowledge about internal diversity and therefore fails to acknowledge it, thereby failing to recognise the engagement and experiences of pupils from these traditions and the importance of this diversity in current events. A focus on Representation ensures that student teachers are aware that diversity in belief and practice exists in all faiths, which enables them to encourage exploration and discussion. Sensitising students who are not RE specialists to recognise the reality of religious difference in their pupils’ lives is crucial to creating a classroom dynamic where difference is not seen as threatening, but as interesting. Acknowledgement of the religious ‘tradition’ as Jackson identifies, enables broader understanding of the distinctiveness of each religion studied, however ‘group’ and ‘individual’ levels provide opportunity to recognise a reality which children see in their own lives.

Family decisions about religious observation will inform children’s understandings, but young children are not usually in a position to interrogate those practices, but rather to accept them as their norm. Meeting others of the same faith or different, who may celebrate a festival or worship in other ways, can cause classroom disagreement, as each child considers their way as ‘correct.’ If a classroom teacher understands this and is able to defuse disagreement through reassuring children that different practices are not ‘wrong’, this contributes to a developing recognition which is central to a young child’s engagement with social as well as cultural and religious diversity. This socialising focus is central to a primary

teacher's role in encouraging children to work together and be tolerant of each other's differences.

There are further criticisms of the Interpretive Approach concerning the politicisation of RE, (Gearon, 2013), which has been revisited through recent contributions by David Lewin (2017) and a response from Robert Jackson (Jackson, 2017). These criticisms are fundamental in considering the purpose and pedagogy of RE, particularly in non-faith schools. Gearon's concern is that the purpose of RE, as delivered through the Interpretive Approach, is, at heart, transmitting a political intention towards developing a cohesive but commonly secular society. Gearon (2013) traces this from the European Enlightenment onwards as a political and social intention, predicated on human and children's rights, redeveloped more recently in the Citizenship agenda and found in the 1989 *Convention of the Rights of the Child* and documents such as the *Toledo Principles* (OSCE/ ODIHR, 2007) and the *Ajegbo Report* (DfES, 2007). Gearon's argument emphasises the way in which a secular discourse is frequently used to promote tolerance and respect, but considers that this ignores the importance of recognising competing truth-claims in different religions.

Yet beyond the education of the individual for self-betterment, society has considerable expectation of education as a social harmoniser. This is a responsibility not only in RE, but underpins a broader discussion of the purpose of education itself (Kant, 1904; Dewey, 1933; Biesta, 2013). I recognise a validity in Gearon's argument, which requires RE to recognise the importance of studying religion in its own right, and upholding the truth claims of religions without disingenuous homogenisation or reduction to social cohesion messages, but consider the establishment of a shared discourse, which includes a secular recognition of the importance of teaching about religion, has immediate relevance for primary teachers because RE has a socialising as well as an academic role to play in the primary school. Young children are not yet able to engage with some of the complex concepts of religions, nor can they understand competing truth claims, but the primary school is the place for pupils to begin their engagement with 'the other' and develop positive and socially appropriate approaches to broadening their understanding of the world, beyond their own familiar surroundings and experience, which includes consideration of different ways of being and thinking. Elements of the Interpretive Approach such as representation and reflexivity directly assist teachers in adjusting their understanding of the place of RE in inclusive primary education, and provide a starting place for student teachers to recognise the complexities of lived religion by drawing children into investigation and dialogue. In addition

*phronesis* plays its part here through student teachers' sensitisation to individual pupils' backgrounds and their capacity to use this information to tailor their responses to each child's understanding.

Although criticism also exists of the Interpretive Approach through the complexities of building in mature ethnographic study and anthropological discipline into classroom practice, I am encouraged by the reassurance offered by Eleanor Nesbitt in *Intercultural Education*,

You may realise not only that you can become an ethnographer- but even that you already are an ethnographer in your sympathetic receptivity and critical attentiveness to the patterning of individuals' and groups' concepts and activities. (Nesbitt, 2004, 5)

This supports the view that ethnography can have a natural place in classroom research and some of its approaches can be used to encourage student teachers to engage with the Interpretive Approach, through their decisions on how to respond to children's discussions and encourage study of religious practice.

## **2.2 Developing an understanding of *phronesis***

I was initially introduced to the concept of *phronesis*, (which is frequently translated as 'practical wisdom') by Judith Everington, one of the researchers in the REDCo Community of Practice, who recommended John Loughran's book, *Developing a Pedagogy of Teacher Education* (Loughran, 2006) to assist my reflections on the process of teacher education. Her interest was in Loughran's discussion about the relationship between theory and practice and how theory could be used to influence classroom practice positively (Loughran, 2006).

Loughran raised the issue of student teachers' attitudes towards theory and their lack of use of theory in their practice. The identification of theory and practice which he uses with his students was applied in Everington's research for REDCo with secondary subject teachers in RE (Everington, 2009a). Everington was using the Interpretive Approach as a means of introducing theory which 'might contribute to the students' professional development', thereby both expanding and interrogating the relationship between theory and practice in her students' thinking (Everington, 2009a, 101). I could see the relevance of her dilemma about theory as I considered how a relationship between theory and practice could be developed in my module. I had a potentially concept-changing theory which had strongly influenced my understanding of teaching, which I wanted to teach, but I also needed to respect the students' varying stages of development (Everington, 2009a, 102). Everington was engaged in developing her understanding of the Interpretive Approach through its practical application,

so her feedback on her project was particularly rich for me as a new researcher. I also felt strong connections to the socio-constructivist approach she took to her sessions, where she encouraged students to share their experiences, beliefs and ideas (Everington, 2009a, 103-4).

### **Aristotelian *Phronesis***

The Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* is used to question the nature and role of knowledge in professions such as teaching and nursing, where practitioners are creating and applying knowledge, often rapidly, in the process of making professional decisions (Korthagen *et al*, 2001; Loughran, 2006; Russell and Loughran, 2007; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012; Orchard and Winch, 2015). In such professionally-charged situations individuals are drawing on a range of different knowledges and understandings, selecting and rejecting ideas to assist in making appropriate decisions and practically applying them. If asked, practitioners will sometimes talk about using their ‘common sense’, but in reality the sense they are using is often not ‘common’, but very specific to that profession and is built up through observations of more experienced practitioners, shared understandings, past experience and specific assessment of the particular situation they are responding to.

I became particularly interested in how my students learned to make judgements about the needs of classes and individual children and reflected these in their teaching. As a link tutor I saw students developing their skills in decision-making, in particular through discussions with their class teachers and mentors, which then resulted in more nuanced attempts to promote children’s learning. These moments of decision were informed by a mixture of knowledge of how children learn, subject knowledge which enabled them to apply next steps to assist a child’s development, knowledge of how the individual child and the group within which s/he was working were likely to react to the teacher’s intervention, pupil readiness, awareness of what else was occurring in the room and knowledge of how the class teacher supported individuals and groups fairly and professionally. All these knowledges were in play at the moment of decision, so how did they manage the tensions which arose between them? When asked, the students could justify their decisions and responses to children and frequently used moral reference points to justify their actions. Equity and fairness frequently played a part in their decision-making, as did awareness of individuals’ educational needs and how fairness could be applied to them. If students were able to be so nuanced and inclusive about educational needs, could they also develop and employ *phronesis* when responding to

children's cultural and religious understandings, using their knowledge of children's development?

Drawing on Aristotelian thinking in particular, the dimensions of *episteme*, *phronesis* and *techne* all have a role to play in exploring what supports such decision-making, even if these terms have evolved differently from Aristotle's original thinking, because of individual and cultural developments in understanding and ontological positioning.

### ***Episteme, Phronesis and Techne***

What might be the nature and possible hierarchy of knowledge? In Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses his understanding of different types of intellectual virtue and knowledge making (Aristotle, 1999). He examines both the relationship between different forms of knowledge, including 'theoretical wisdom' (*episteme*), 'practical wisdom' (*phronesis*), and 'craft expertise' (*techne*), and the nature of action within and between them. Of these three types of knowledge, Aristotle values theoretical or abstract wisdom over practical wisdom, arguing that practical wisdom is used in achieving theoretical wisdom, and he contrasts *techne* with both, as being more context-related (Kessels and Korthagen, 2001). Within this hierarchy, Aristotle's overarching view is that all forms of knowledge should be related to what is good for humankind, thereby contextualising and valuing knowledge in relation to human understanding.

In Aristotle's conception, ... *episteme* is characterised as scientific, universal, invariable, context-independent knowledge... *Techne* is characterised as context-dependent, pragmatic, variable, craft knowledge and is oriented toward practical instrumental rationality governed by a conscious goal... *Phronesis*, on the other hand, is an intellectual virtue that implies ethics. It involves deliberation that is based on values, concerned with practical judgement and informed by reflection. It is pragmatic, variable, context-dependent, and oriented toward action.

(Kinsella and Pitman, 2012, 2)

*Phronesis* is therefore of particular interest because the development of student teachers requires them to become increasingly competent in making decisions which are appropriate to their pupils, but which are not clearly defined or pre-ordered because they are dependent on the student's ability to read and react to individual situations. In general, the response of a teacher will be influenced by their perception of a particular child's needs and understanding. So as students became more confident in their *phronetic* decision-making, I was interested to see if this understanding and confidence could be extended to teaching RE.



Aristotle differentiates between two different types of action, *poiesis* and *praxis*. *Poiesis* is seen as action which produces something which ‘did not exist before’ and *praxis* as action which brings about ‘human flourishing’ (Biesta, 2013,132-133). *Techne* is used in relation to *poiesis*, in that it is concerned with ‘how things should be done’ or technical knowledge. *Phronesis*, in contrast, is related to *praxis*, in that through moral judgement the actor determines ‘what is to be done’ (Biesta, 2013,133). In the context I am researching, *praxis* is the area in which I am more interested, because moral judgement is what students are demonstrating through their discussions of developing classroom management. However this contrasts with many student teachers’ anxieties about teaching, which can focus on *poiesis*, through their anxieties about the appropriate delivery of their teaching, particularly in areas of weak subject knowledge.

Aristotle’s division of aspects of knowledge is also helpful in considering objective and subjective understandings of the nature of knowledge. An objective, scientific claim sees knowledge as true, independent of human understanding. It can be tested and discovered through deduction. This is seen as *episteme*, or as Kessels and Korthagen, call it ‘Theory with a capital T’ (2001, 21) in their discussion about the relationship between theory and practice. A hierarchy in value terms between abstract knowledge or theory and practical knowledge, following Aristotle’s understandings, can be asserted not only in scientific, but also in educational research (Kessels and Korthagen, 2001; Loughran, 2006); although alternative constructs of knowledge are found through reflexivity (Schön, 1986), Geertz’s (1973) understanding of reality as reported through ‘thick ‘ descriptions, or Lyotard’s discussion of the values of narrative and scientific knowledge (Lyotard, 1984). These all demonstrate ‘alternative models of understanding’ (Kessels and Korthagen, 2001, 21) which challenge Aristotle’s hierarchy, but the privileging of *episteme* over *phronesis* is frequently maintained, especially in positivist thinkers, because of its pure, more general and abstract, deductive form.

The problem of *episteme* in terms of the education of student teachers is that theory is, by its nature, general and student teachers frequently need a more practical and flexible form of knowledge which is ‘essentially perceptual instead of conceptual’ (Kessels and Korthagen, 2001, 25) to help them understand and act in specific situations. This type of knowledge can be extrapolated to differing contexts by the student if they perceive, subjectively, that its application can assist them to improve a situation. Therefore, if a student teacher can engage with their knowledge of particular children’s religious understanding and backgrounds in

their teaching, they are more likely to teach effectively. Recognising diversity is a first step, because then the student teacher is more open to listening for nuances of understanding. This replaces the non-specialists' tendency to deliver knowledge, of which they are often themselves insecure, from planned lessons which do not seek to reflect children's own understandings.

Aristotle's analysis of *phronesis*, as described above, has value for those who consider knowledge to be more subjectively created. His definition has a particular relevance for the lecturers of student teachers. Teaching is value-rich and highly ethical, in that teachers consider the value and good of what they do, both to the individual and to the community. To teach students about teaching is to both share and develop a mutual understanding of the values that teachers require as part of their professional role. Even in a performative climate such as the one teachers operate in today (DfE, 2010; Bryan and Revell, 2011; Biesta, 2013), values are at the centre of the process of becoming a teacher and frequently sustain students when teaching becomes challenging. 'Making a difference' matters to student teachers, but their knowledge of how to do this is not purely theoretical; teachers operate in practical and emotionally-rich environments, making decisions in response to changing situations. Here *phronesis* or practical wisdom has particular resonance, because of its situated ethical nature.

Aristotle's third type of knowledge, *techne*, also has relevance in teaching, in the context of knowing *how* to technically proceed. *Techne* can be seen as craft knowledge which is essential to new teachers to build up their confidence in being able to teach. Competence in the classroom is judged through the *Teaching Standards* and, as Biesta identifies, 'has a certain rhetorical appeal (Biesta, 2013,122). Being perceived as incompetent is the worst nightmare for a student teacher, so being shown **what** to do and **how** to do it are high priorities in their understanding of training. Requests for technical know-how can mask the importance of *phronesis*, because it is less clearly defined or acquired. It is not enough to know how to do a practical skill, it is essential teachers **become** skilled in decision-making, because this is central to the quality of their teaching. Reading a situation and reacting, so that pupils are supported, encouraged and challenged, requires recognition of possible choices and sometimes split-second decisions which can influence a learner's future. This is the expert *phronesis* that experienced teachers exercise continually and students need to develop. There has recently been considerable debate about the future of teacher training informed by the idea of teaching being a 'craft' (Gove, 2010; DfE, 2010); however, *techne* lacks the ethical

dimension of *phronesis*, which assists the student not only in doing, but in making decisions as to what is the right thing to do, thereby creating teachers rather than technicians.

Reflecting on *episteme* and *phronesis* clarified two contesting problems for my module:

How could students learn about world religions in such a short space of time?

How could I teach students how to teach this subject, acknowledging its problematic nature and bringing some of the recent areas of scholarship to assist students in finding their own understandings and practice?

All subjects have their own subject knowledge and pedagogies. In this case what would I emphasise? Given the brevity of my course, my own *phronesis* assisted me in looking at how I could develop layers of teaching, differentiating material and approaches so that students could engage with the subject by harnessing their developing understanding of what were appropriate and good decisions for pupils' education. I wanted to produce a transformative course but as the research progressed, it also became clearer that I needed to consider more deeply the unstated assumptions which lay behind my teaching and behind the students' learning, in order to begin to tease out the different dynamics I was using and building in my classroom. The problems for RE initially seemed to be with the nature of the subject and the lack of time to spend developing student knowledge and understanding. But, although these issues are important, other more complex concepts underlie them, leading to questioning about the relationship between subject knowledge and pedagogy.

I found Flyvbjerg's use of the Dreyfus and Dreyfus model (1968) helpful, in that it encourages consideration of five stages of development towards *phronetic* competence. These develop from 'novice', through 'advanced beginner, competent performer, proficient performer' to 'expert'. (Flyvbjerg, 2001,10). Although I question the idea of stages, seeing development as less structured and more dependent on circumstance, the progression described by both Dreyfus and Dreyfus and Flyvbjerg, has immediate resonance with the development of student teachers. Flyvbjerg's description of the 'novice' is that of one who learns the rules for action but has not yet grappled with the influence of context on the application of those rules. In the student teacher this results in, for example, knowing that inclusion is theoretically important, but not yet understanding how that idea can transform their actions. In RE this can equate to the student or teacher who knows how to plan an RE lesson theoretically or deliver a plan given to them, but is not able to adjust the lesson content to the pupils in front of them. For the 'advanced beginner', in contrast, context has become much more significant and is mediated by personal experience. Some students are sufficiently

empathetic to be able to use this filter from early on in their training. With undergraduate student teachers in their first and second teaching experience there is usually a movement from novice to advanced beginner, as students recognise the need for *phronetic* judgements which help them to vary their responses to individuals' needs in the class. During their subsequent practices, student teachers can begin the move through 'advanced beginner' towards 'competent performer'. This is, for the majority of students, the development which is taking place during the phase of training when my module is taught. The sense of responsibility identified by Flyvbjerg is central to the decision-making students are making. They are interpreting evolving situations and recognising their role in managing them professionally and morally, through their use of personal judgement. The students' discourse becomes more assertive in terms of what is 'right' for the pupils and they can make judgements based on past experience and professional training, while maintaining the flexibility required in managing individuals in their care.

By identifying the idea of diversity in religions early in the module, I provide an opportunity for students to develop a new dimension to their developing *phronesis*, that of including religious identity as part of their knowledge of the children they teach and the subject matter they engage with. Becoming skilled in making appropriate and valid decisions based on holistic and interpretive assessments of situations takes experience, and, as part of that developing expertise, they are encouraged to re-imagine the religious material they are teaching **in the context of their pupils**. This places the children at the centre of their learning, rather than the subject-matter and ensures that the teacher does not 'deliver' a lesson, but rather crafts the lesson around the understandings of the pupils. This is not, however, mere *techné*. The underlying reasoning is that of a different relationship between the material and the child, where the inclusive instinct of the teacher enables him/her to engage the children in investigation, triggered by their own interest in others. It requires teachers to create opportunities which value the process of thinking and where children can reflect and philosophise.

This is a far remove from some of the RE opportunities that students get on teaching practice. They are frequently asked to teach without proper reflection that they may have children from differing traditions and non-believers in their class and how this material might be interpreted by them. Unfamiliarity with the material can also undermine their confidence if the children begin to question what they are learning. This results in anxiety about what is to be taught, how it is to be taught and what to do if the children are more knowledgeable than the teacher.

Such anxieties are addressed through promoting pupil dialogue and modelling the value to teachers of learning from their pupils in an open enquiry-led classroom. In addition, by referencing how they would manage such situations in other subjects, the students are reassured that their ‘teacher-craft’ can guide them in making appropriate educational decisions and managing pupil knowledge positively. So emphasis changes from what to teach to how to teach, which places them on more familiar pedagogical ground. Reminding them of their growing expertise closes the gap between RE and other subjects and ensures they engage with *phronesis* in RE as well as elsewhere in their teaching.

## **2.3 Developing an understanding of pedagogy in teacher education**

### **Definitions of pedagogy**

This section discusses my understanding of pedagogy and how the term will be used in my research. Pedagogy is an over-arching term which is used broadly in a range of educational circles and has come to have different meanings. (Murphy, 1996; Alexander, 2004; Leach and Moon, 2008).

I see pedagogy as both the underlying theory and the practice of teaching. Decisions about what knowledge is, and what is deemed valuable in terms of transmission or discovery, influence pedagogy. In order to make pedagogical choices, teachers need to recognise their epistemological position in relationship to the content of what is to be studied and also the influence the manner of teaching will have on a recipient’s epistemological understanding.

Both an individual teacher’s and society’s understanding of the purpose of education can underpin choice in pedagogical method. If education is intended to perpetuate the social *status quo*, then both content and the methods will be employed to endeavour to sustain it, by for example providing information but not encouraging questioning of its basis. Alternatively education can critically challenge and transform the *status quo*, requiring discussion of what is deemed good for and in society.

Edward Franklin Buchner, in his translation and edition of *Kant’s Educational Theory*, states that Kant’s analysis of education transcends a ‘simple, limited interaction shaped by the teacher’ to the idea that ‘education means, in the fullest sense of the term, a progressive interaction between the individual child and humanity ( Kant/Buchner, 1904, 69).

This indicates a vision of pedagogy far beyond ‘mechanical’ presentation of material to a child. Kant considered that

children should be educated *not* with reference to their present condition, but rather with regard to a possibly improved future state of the human race - that is, according to *the idea of humanity*’

(Kant ,1904, 116) (italics in the original)

In these terms, pedagogy is strongly determined by the moral and social purpose the teacher believes underpins the purpose of education.

I see pedagogy as more art than craft, in that I believe pedagogy should be determined by teachers creatively in response to the needs of their pupils rather than through imitation of others (Eisner, 1983). ‘Art’ implies more freedom to creatively choose from a repertoire of teaching skills and strategies, although this skill-base needs to be in place before effective choices can be made (Kirk, 2011). The process is complex, because in order for a teacher to teach well, they need to understand, observe and practise teaching themselves. Part of observation is to recognise the process of teaching enacted by other teachers, but the emphasis then should be not on replicating practice, but involves reflection on what has been observed and adaption of methods or understandings into the student teacher’s own schema, leading to a reflective practitioner improving their own teaching (Schön, 1986).

Pedagogy is underpinned by consideration of which values are to be espoused and promoted to influence children who are already citizens of the world, not merely in preparation for this role. The relationship between *phronesis* and pedagogy exists in the moral sphere identified by both Aristotle and Kant. The knowledge a teacher possesses in the act of teaching includes the pupils as well as the subject, both *phronesis* and *episteme*.

### **Pedagogy of teacher education**

There is a gap between the levels at which the students access the teacher educator’s knowledge of teaching and the understanding teacher educators have about the process themselves. The role of the teacher educator is to engage the student teachers at multiple levels, interrogating their perceptions of teaching, including what has to be taught, ways in which it may be taught, why it should be taught and how the effectiveness of the teaching and learning might be measured. Loughran (2006) uses Aristotle’s definitions of knowledge to

interrogate these multiple levels, seeing *phronesis* as an essential part of the student teachers' development of teaching knowledge.

Kessels and Korthagen's analysis of *episteme* (propositional knowledge) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) (Korthagen *et al.*, 2001), considers the gap between the theory of teaching and the students' need for understanding which is built on their previous experience. I am particularly interested in the difference between perceptual and conceptual knowledge, recognising that the subjective experiences the students have had in school are a dominant factor in their understanding of teaching and learning and, in the case of RE, their approach to it as a subject and their belief in its value.

As they had just returned from SE the students can be encouraged to use their perceptual knowledge of the children they had taught as a measure against which my conceptual explanations could be assessed. I needed to harness their understanding of what worked in the classroom to extend their understanding of the more theoretical concepts I wanted to embed, thus closing the 'theory-practice gap' discussed by Loughran in his consideration of teacher education pedagogy (Loughran, 2006). Loughran considers how students need to be able to relate the theory they learn to the practice they experience through demonstrating their inter-relationship. The value of the theory, for the students, lies in its use in understanding the problems which arise within their experiences.

pedagogy is not merely the action of teaching (which itself can easily be misinterpreted as the transmission of information), ... it is about the relationship between teaching and learning and how together they lead to growth in knowledge and understanding through meaningful practice.

(Loughran, 2006, 2)

Korthagen (2001b) builds further on the place of relationship in conceptualising an understanding of pedagogy which goes beyond issues associated with teaching and learning *per se* and focusing on the importance of self-development and relationship. He writes:

I follow Kohnstamm (1929), who stated that many durable learning experiences are rooted in the I-you relationship between teacher and student, in genuine personal encounters in which both are, within the here-and-now, in contact with their inner selves.' (Korthagen, 2001b, 264).

Student teachers are strongly influenced by their perceptions about the relationships they have had with classes and with individual pupils within a class. Building relationships requires positive attitudes, empathetic understanding of the process of being taught and

requires time and reflection. Students speak of the need for enthusiasm and commitment while they are teaching, to engage their pupils. The personal relationships between teacher educators and students are just as crucial, as the teacher educator models appropriate pedagogies built on the relationships and perceptions they have of their students, which, in turn, shapes the exploration and use of pedagogy itself.

Reading the writings of teacher educators engaged in teacher self-study has articulated many of the issues and concerns I have about the process of modelling RE with students. I am aware of my own enthusiasm when teaching, and part of the relationship I build with students is to try to transmit that enthusiasm to them. Yet while I am teaching, I also need to use an ethnographic lens to consider the impact, intended and unintended, positive and negative which students experience through the process of receiving my teaching. I need to be aware of what is having impact and how that impact is viewed. Does it enable students to reflect more deeply or can it intrude and prevent the very learning I am trying to promote? To 'reflect in action' and about action, requires my *phronesis* which I then can articulate with students to assist them in improving their understanding of teaching RE (Schön, 1983, 1986).

Loughran (2007) describes the reflection employed by teacher educators so that they

knowingly and purposefully create opportunities for students of teaching to see into teaching'...'making teaching a site for enquiry'....'opening teaching to questioning, probing, reflection and critique which goes beyond the technical. (Loughran 2007, 1)

This requires making the teaching itself a subject in the sessions, as well as the RE content being considered. I have, over a number of years tried to enact 'making the tacit explicit' (Loughran, 2007, 2). This is a complex and rather convoluted procedure which I have found best managed in small episodes of my own teaching, interrupted by questions to the students about the decision-making they could identify in the directions my teaching took. This means particularly interrogating the questions I ask, and the dialogic patterns I adopt to interrogate, respond and extend student responses (Alexander, 2008). This requires tactful positioning on my part so that no student feels their responses have not been respected. In the process of repetition over several years, I have identified one session which provides the best opportunity for this activity, which can then be referred to in subsequent sessions; in Session 2 where we discuss 'bootstrapping' as an enquiry process (Grimmitt, Grove, Hull and Spencer, 1991). Analysing the nature of the questions I ask and the responses they give, which steer the questioning, gives the students an opportunity to think about appropriate types of



questions and deepens their understanding of dialogue, using a specific model of teacher/pupil talk.

Reflecting on this episode has been important in understanding the theories developed by teacher-educators to interrogate their practice. Issues such as vulnerability, honesty with both self and others and recognition of complexity all play their part in the process of teaching (Korthagen, 2001a).

I have adopted this approach because it enables me to model ways of teaching RE which address the anxieties I recognise and some students express. It is tempting on occasion to tell students what to say or do, but this merely reinforces a perception of teaching as a craft rather than requiring wisdom. Telling students what to do or say does not transfer the reasoning behind the decision-making to the students' own sense of agency in the same way as interrogating decision-making with them. The process takes time, in a busy session, but it improves the students' confidence in teaching because they have experienced the episode with me, seeing my vulnerability, identifying key moments and formulating interventions which they consider will make a difference. Senese notes that teachers have little practice in articulating their pedagogical reasoning, which can leave them largely unaware of the 'larger purposes, the over-arching goals and the deeper questions involved in teaching and learning' (Senese, 2007, 50). As RE is seen as 'potentially controversial' by students, this interactive session is important in connecting their understanding of what they can or should do with their moral reasoning, so that they understand the potential impact of the decision-making process, which underlies the action of teaching. This activity demonstrates the importance of establishing safe spaces and open relationships with students

A teacher's norms and values, and the extent to which they are enacted in practice, influence the manner [in] which students develop their own. Thus personal relationship between teachers and students is crucial as identity formation and personal growth combine to shape the nature of pedagogy itself. (Loughran, 2006, 2)

This awareness of relationship has informed my understanding about the tensions between being a teacher 'in the moment' with my students. This enables my own *phronesis* to be recognised while researching and teaching contemporaneously. Teacher self-study (situated in practitioner research) has enabled me to interrogate my decision-making after my teaching, but released me to engage the students in recognising what influences them as they make decisions in the classroom.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology, Ethics and Methods**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores my developing experience and understanding of methodologies I have employed as part of my research process. It charts an evolution of understanding, both in timescale and methodological organisation of what has been at times a fragmented process, driven by a desire to understand how my own practice might influence the understanding of my students. The research reflects the messiness and complexity of the context in which I am working; fraught with political, educational and social tensions (Gearon, 2009; DfE, 2010; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Chater and Erricker, 2013; Clarke and Woodhead, 2015). It has not been a smooth journey from research design, through data collection to findings and conclusions, because the reality has included problems over access to students and research sites, changes in research methods and intruding professional requirements as a lecturer, which have changed my understandings of my teaching and researching roles. This reflects the metamorphosis of my understanding of methodological structures, recognition of the development of my own understandings, analysis and evaluation of small-scale research and a continuing recognition and clarification of the reality of being a practitioner researcher.

The first part of the chapter explores my understanding of ontology and epistemology and considers the change from action to practitioner research within the research and the reasons for my adoption of the latter. My engagement with practitioner research includes elements of ethnography, ethnomethodology and self-study, as a result of reflection on aspects such as collaboration and teacher empowerment in my research.

The second part of the chapter discusses ethical considerations arising from the nature and conduct of the research and the third part discusses the methods used to conduct the research. Following this there is a description and discussion of the methods used to create and assess data.

### **Ontology and epistemology**

I consider ontology to be the study of the nature of being and epistemology to be the theory of the method or grounds of knowledge, what is it to know and how knowledge can be acquired and communicated. (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Cohen, *et al.*, 2011; McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). How I perceive these two concepts and their interrelation influences the

underlying questions of my research, my development of methodology and methods and the types of conclusion I reach by the end of the research process.

## **Ontology**

The area in which I am researching is that of social rather than natural phenomena, in that I am researching people and their understandings and interactions rather than objects. As a researcher I reject a positivist view of unchanging reality, although I recognise it as a dominant research paradigm in the public arena, and instead see reality as emergent and changing (Eisner, 2002; Grey, 2009; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). I understand the world as mediated by the experience of individuals, who make sense of the world by reflecting on the lenses through which they see reality. Reality is socially-constructed and multiple rather than independent of individuals and singular (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). One of the challenges for me during the research process has been to extend this thinking into all areas of the study. Thinking as an interpretivist requires a sustained effort of interpretation, especially when so much of the media and public discourse favours a more positivist interpretation of reality. It is very easy for someone to ask, ‘What are you trying to say or prove?’ and expect a clear-cut answer. A response of, ‘I am trying to understand it better’ can carry less recognition of research than ‘I have found a provable answer.’ This difference in approach between seeing social reality as external, independent and fixed rather than nominalist and dependent on interpretation creates tensions because of the differences between me and the participants in my teaching (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). In my research it has become evident that many students are influenced by a view of religions based on reified descriptions (Jackson, 1997). This is undoubtedly linked to the way in which religions are generally taught in school and represented in agreed syllabuses (Revell, 2008) and reflects the impact of phenomenology in the 1970s (Smart, 1973; Barnes, 2001; O’Grady, 2005). Beyond the influence of RE in their schooling, students are also influenced by religious and world views which do not accept an interpretivist paradigm. This may be linked to a religious understanding of the nature of truth as unchanging and divine, or to a belief in positivist understanding as a measure and producer of reality. I recognise that individuals use a range of understandings to explore reality and, although I acknowledge my own ontological position, it is also important for me to understand and include reference to other paradigms in order that all students can access my teaching.

## Epistemology

Epistemology, or the understanding of the nature of knowledge, lies at the centre of my research, because I am researching how I and my students create knowledge and what we understand knowledge to be.

According to MacNiff and Whitehead, research has three functions: to create and add to knowledge, to test knowledge claims and to generate new theory (2010, 8). If these three purposes are interrogated, knowledge claims lie at the centre of research, whatever methods are employed to discover it. Positivist and more recently post-positivist paradigms of research operate within an understanding of knowledge which seeks or is absolute truth (Eisner, 2002), where ‘causes probably determine effects or outcomes’ (Creswell, 2009, 7; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). This is built on an understanding that there is an objective reality, one which exists beyond the person or persons researching and which can be tested through repeated experiments to assess research questions or hypotheses. This is often referred to as the ‘scientific method’, where a theory or hypothesis is formed, tested through experimentation, from which data is collected and analysed to test and modify the theory (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2009; Grey, 2009; Robson, 2011; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). It can be seen as a deductive process which begins with a universal view and works back to particulars, in contrast to inductive, working from fragmentary details to a connected view (Dewey, 1933 cited in Grey, 2009, 14). It also tends to see human activity as pre-determined and therefore relatively passive (Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

My epistemological position is that knowledge is created by individuals in social interaction and does not exist in isolation. I am therefore considering knowledge through an interpretive paradigm which acknowledges other forms of knowledge in contrast to the scientific, and rejects passive behaviourism in favour of creative human agency (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, 19). I consider that human beings construct theories to explain or interpret their world and therefore see knowledge as interpreted, related to experience and personally constructed. (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Truth emerges from the process of research itself, rather than being pre-existent and there is no absolute truth; only that generated within a community (Gergen and Gergen, 2008).

This position complicates claims for research findings because the creation of knowledge and interpretation of that which is perceived as knowledge is subjective. In this paradigm the role of the researcher is central to the construction of knowledge, because it is through his/her

interpretation that the claims for new knowledge emerge and are scrutinised by others. This creates a particular relationship between the researcher and that which is researched, making it intellectually unlikely, and indeed in many ways undesirable, that the researcher can set aside their preconceptions when analysing information. Knowledge consists of interpretation of information both grounded and gained in the research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2011, 18) and the relationship of that knowledge to the understandings of others. The researcher is moving towards a clearer understanding of the whole through an examination of each of the parts, through his/her own interpretation. This leads to a multi-layered attempt at holistic understanding (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) through ‘attempts to establish patterns, consistencies and meanings’ which speak within the subjective understanding of the particular research (Grey, 2009, 15). In this argument, knowledge is what we come to know, but the claim that it is true is subjective, in that it is true to that person or group of people.

Subjective claims about truth are more complex to authenticate than more scientific understandings which search for an objective truth. If a truth is apparent to the researcher, based on their own understandings of a situation, how can it also be presented in a form for others to interrogate? The nature of interpretive research makes it difficult to replicate and even if it were approximately repeated, how could the understandings of the first researcher be replicated by another (Cohen *et al.*, 2011)? Understanding is personalised and predicated on the previous experience of both the researcher and researched and discovered through the process of the research. For me Husserl’s concept of *epoché*, or the bracketing out of presuppositions (Jackson, 1997; Cohen *et al.*, 2011) is not sustainable, as those presuppositions influence the choice, process and findings of research. Yet those operating in a similar community may have some shared language, experience and agreement as to how claims might be made and, through their own interpretation of the evidence, also critique the ‘truths’ which emerge in the process of the research. This influences the nature and presentation of any knowledge I create through the process of research. It also raises questions of relationship within knowledge. Is knowledge hierarchical, in that some elements of knowledge are more important or valued than others and if so, who makes that judgement?

### **Researcher position**

My research position is value laden, in that my teaching and research is conducted in the belief that there is a situation which needs to be understood so that it can be improved (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). Understanding can be brought about through investigation

not only of my position, activity and beliefs, but through enquiry into the positions, beliefs and understandings of those with whom I interact during this research. To understand a complex situation I need to recognise the values that I and others bring to that situation as well as other components such as knowledge, culture and experience. In value terms, I have an underlying belief in the value of education to develop knowledgeable, balanced and well-rounded individuals and communities who can interact productively and ethically with others in society. In stating this, I expose my Western European philosophical roots (Dewey, 1933; Peters, 1970). I believe that education has a valuable role to play in individuals' search for knowledge, meaning and justice, and in promoting a respectful as well as tolerant, democratic society. I am a passionate advocate of RE as part of this educational endeavour, because I believe it can create opportunities for pupils to develop and reflect on their own understandings and identity, as well as to be educated positively about diversity through understanding the beliefs of others and exploring what it means to be human.

Yet in that statement of belief, each of the terms, such as 'knowledgeable, balanced and well-rounded' need to be interrogated, because they are laden with interpretation, influenced by who and what I am. When such terms are used with other people, what meanings do they acquire? How do I and my students co-construct new understandings together and how do these understandings inform the professional role of teachers which we have in common? In this quest for knowledge I cannot divide myself as dispassionate observer at one stage and a passionate teacher at another, but through reflexivity recognise the impact of my teaching position on my research and *vice versa*.

My ontological position means I need to interrogate and re-interrogate what I consider to be reliable or valid. Not only do I have my own position to consider and utilise to assist me in understanding what I think I see, I also attempt to consider and include a range of possible and varied ontological positions for my students in my teaching. Ontology is not something we discuss directly, however in many ways it is the 'elephant in the room' during my teaching sessions, because we are all operating with a variety of belief systems and views of reality which could lead to disagreement and argument.

Although I do not specifically ask my students to publically identify any religious affiliations they may have, it is evident during sessions that there are a range of different beliefs which the students recognise among themselves. I try to be 'reassuringly inclusive' (student phrase) in my teaching sessions because I believe students need to be reassured that religious

education can be conducted in open and respectful ways and also benefit from examples of inclusion being actively promoted (Jackson and Everington, 2017). I am professionally responsible for inculcating the inclusive, ethical stance expected of primary teachers, which is referred to in the Teaching Standards (DfE, 2011b). Inclusive practice is central to all primary education, both in the students' university modules and in the primary schools in which they train. Jackson and Everington's comments on the difference between impartiality and neutrality (2017, 10) are important here because imposed neutrality would remove the voice of the individual teacher, whereas impartiality encourages non-discriminatory teaching. The impact of this shared understanding of inclusion during sessions can, however, reduce the possibility of disagreement about religious truth claims and it needs to be recognised that although that we all tacitly agree to discuss without provocation, we are also couching our statements in ways which allow for others to hold different views of reality without discussion. Although this approach reassures students who are fearful of dispute, and provides a professional position and model which gives confidence, it can lead to a veneer of respect which fails to identify and grapple with the great philosophical questions and truth claims which RE contains, (Gearon, 2013) and thereby can maintain a theory/practice gap by not investigating ontological and epistemological claims which influence *phronetic* understandings.

### **3.1 Methodological Approaches**

#### **3.1.1 Inductive Research**

The methods used in my research: questionnaires, interviews, observations, conversations, analysis of assignments and reflection, are interpreted by me and my participants as collected information provided within a socio-constructive understanding, shared by most of us and conditioned by the educational world we all inhabit. This means that the status of claims made as a result of this research could to be viewed as valid within the relative construct of the research community in which I am operating (O'Grady, 2009; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Claims that this research also creates new knowledge beyond our immediate situation will be explored in the conclusions of the research.

I believe that my interaction with students has the potential to develop our mutual understandings and provoke questions about our assumptions, but I am not seeking to theorise what those developments might be before the research event, nor constructing hypotheses to test through research. New knowledge will be emergent from the particular

situations reported and will only provisionally generalised for widespread application, dependent on the interpretation placed by the reader through the lenses of their own situation and epistemological position (Reason and Bradbury, 2008).

Much of my research uses an inductive approach, through adopting qualitative research methods, though there is also some use of quantitative methods, where deemed appropriate, to further interrogate information emerging from data. These qualitative methods have been continued to provide opportunities of triangulation to assist further reflection.

### **3.1.2 Action Research**

A short discussion of Action Research is included here as it was the initial methodology employed from 2006-2009 when gathering data during and following the REDCo project (see Timeline) and therefore informed the early interpretation of that data. It was the common research methodology explored within the community of practice, although not all participants used it throughout their projects. Increasing recognition that it was not as appropriate for my later research led to an adoption of Practitioner Research methodology from 2010.

Action Research is a recognised term for a group of research approaches conducted in order to improve one's own practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). It could be better described as an 'orientation to inquiry' than a specific methodology (Reason and Bradbury (2008,1). This allows considerable flexibility in the means of research, but some underlying understandings are held in common by those who use the approach. As an approach it interfaces well with my epistemological and ontological positions. It is based on a social constructive worldview, thereby utilising an interpretive paradigm on the nature of knowledge as interpreted and co-constructed with others (Gergen and Gergen, 2008; Creswell, 2009). Constituent parts of action research are generally agreed to be: it is based in practice and responds to a practical situation, it involves construction of knowledge through action, participation in the research by the subjects of the research and elements of democratic expression and development of human agency (Grey, 2009; McNiff and Whitehead, 2010; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Baumfield, Hall and Wall, 2013). A frequent characteristic of action research is that of spirality, where there is a cycle of planning, action and reflection, preparing for further iterations of research. An action research approach differs from traditional research in that the role of the researcher is made more prominent and the question of objectivity is tackled through placing the



researcher within the research rather than outside it. Many of these elements were influential from the beginning of my research and have resonance with practitioner research as well.

### **Interrogating Action Research as a methodology**

Reflecting on MacNiff and Whitehead's definition of action research (2010), it became apparent in 2009-10 that certain elements had not been achieved during the REDCo research. For example, at that stage I lacked time to interrogate and deconstruct the knowledge being created within the module with the students and there was therefore little recognition of thinking that was collaboratively re-constructed. At this stage the potential for intentional political engagement was only vaguely identified and therefore opportunities to begin to interrogate social and cultural transformation were under-developed. I recognised that the actual development intended was that of moving the students towards my understanding of the Interpretive Approach, but in focusing on that, I was less sensitive in recognising what they were telling me about their own understandings. In this sense I was using not a socio-constructive research paradigm, but a more traditional, post-positivist understanding, being beguiled by what, as a new researcher, seemed more robust evidence. This can be seen in the analysis provided in Whitworth 2009, 121-128, where I was imposing a particular framework of understanding on what students have fed back to me.

The stimulus for the action research element of my research was not co-constructed with the students from their requirements, but prompted by a separate and external problem. Other primary teacher-educators had already identified the issues which influenced my research, such as the problems of time, knowledge and confidence in beginning teachers of RE (McCreery, 2005; Revell, 2005). My students identified that they wanted more subject knowledge, but I had reinterpreted their desire to know more about religions to mean investigating what kind of knowledge would be more helpful to them and how a particular approach would assist them. This also had the dynamic of cementing the relationship I had to my students' participation. The power relations between lecturer and student were not addressed. I was unconsciously operating in a post-positivist framework, expecting that I could deduce information from their answers and posit a theory. This created a tension in continuing with action research, as I had not reflected enough on the dynamics I was setting up in my interpretation of the material I had gathered. A basic tenant of action research is that it is carried out in order that effective change could be made which will be beneficial to the contributors (O'Dell, 2009, 59). Meaning was made by me from the students' contributions,

but this could lead to self-affirmation rather than identifying affective change. I risked the paradox identified by Ipgrave, that a less experienced researcher could,

...conflate the students' reviews with the research review taking their assessment of the action strategies at face value, rather than acknowledging the contextual influences and limitations on the pupils' thinking and expression, and applying rigorous interpretive methods to the analysis of their words and meanings.'  
(Ipgrave, 2009, 173)

There was a risk in the research of using student voice to confirm my theories rather than identifying ideas which might contradict or illuminate my own thinking and I therefore needed to consider my own position in the research more carefully.

### **3.1.3 Practitioner Research**

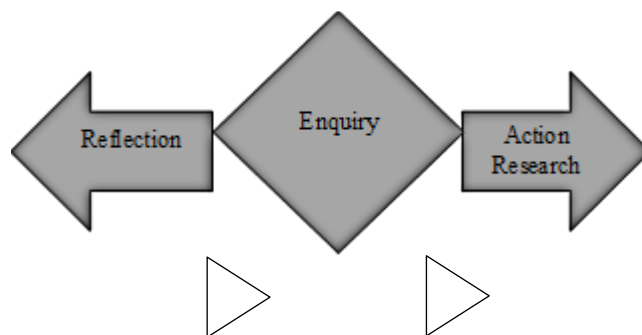
From 2010-16, I developed a clearer methodological focus and adopted a more formal stance of 'practitioner research', to provide a different position of investigation, one which allowed the research methods and questions to evolve from my reflections, but which enabled me to consider further the role of my own positionality in the developing research.

Practitioner research can be defined as research by 'someone who is employed in a professional capacity but who, as part of their role is expected to undertake research' (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007, 1). The first part of this apparently simple definition demonstrates the innate complexity of the practitioner researcher's position. The researcher already has one defined role: that of a professional, before any research has taken place. This means certain expectations and roles are pre-existing, with pre-established understandings and ethical decisions which need to be identified and analysed. The research involves a potentially contradictory internal dialogue between professional expectations and researcher objectives and positioning. These tensions are unlikely to be resolved completely and limitations can be placed on the research and/or on the professional role because the professional expectations take a more dominant public position. In my situation professional ethics require the professional role to dominate, because first and foremost I am a teacher of students and I believe their welfare takes priority over my research requirements. I am not at liberty to follow my research interests to the detriment of their education as student teachers.

The second part of the statement is not as immediately apparent in my professional role. I may be expected to research, but not necessarily my own practice. However looking deeper, the expectation to think like a researcher, to understand the demands being a researcher places upon a professional role and my view of the world through research lenses, whatever

form of research is chosen, also demands a reflective and self-conscious professional position. My choice is to research my own practice, but the dialogue between my two roles inevitably impacts because of the duality of my professional life.

Action research and practitioner research are seen as interrelated by many writing in the action research field. (Altricher, 1993; Kemnis, 2008; Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Cohen, *et al.*, 2011). My adoption of ‘practitioner research’ as a descriptive term for what I was attempting is based on the definition of Baumfield *et al.*, (2013) which places practitioner enquiry between reflection and action research.



*Figure 3.1 – Positioning enquiry between reflection and action research. (Baumfield et al., 2013, 4)*

Although the direction of travel is towards action research in this diagram, (indicated by the two arrows underneath the labelled boxes), it presents a space for enquiry poised and in tension between reflection and action which seemed a more honest description of my position. Cohen, Manion and Morrison identify the separation between those in action research who,

On the one hand are long-time advocates of action research ...who are in the tradition of Schwab and Schön and who emphasize reflective practice...On the other are advocates in the ‘critical’ action research model...

Cohen, *et al.*, 2011, 349

I considered that I was working in the tradition of Schön and I needed to reflect on my researcher position more carefully, given I was less confident about the likelihood that students had agency in my research.

Positioning myself in the space of ‘practitioner enquiry’ enabled me to move away from focusing on the action elements of iteration and collaboration and deepen my understanding of different aspects of my research site by using questions to interrogate progress. For example, I needed to reflect in depth on my own assumptions and how they influenced my interpretation of the material I had gathered. I also needed to investigate areas such as the relationship between teaching about cultural and religious education. I needed to inquire into related areas of literature which could indicate new ways of understanding the student experience, because analysing their responses could only take me so far in understanding my material. I needed more than reflection on action, I sought a position which generated new questions, which looked critically at claims for collaboration and yet did not lose sight of the potential to change.

### **3.1.4 Practical issues**

The questionnaire iterations continued, because I taught the same modules each year and therefore could ask students for their feedback during the module, but I was finding that access to students to develop research using student voices was increasingly problematic, because of the pressures on student time and the timing of the modules I delivered. The undergraduates did not return to the university for eight months after the end of the RE module because of the summer vacation and their next SE, so there was no opportunity to debrief them as a group and develop the courses with their input and I did not see the post-graduates after my module for the rest of their year.

I therefore organised what short studies were possible, but had to realise that the findings could not be seen as robust or necessarily applicable on a wider basis. The insights I gained could be used as triangulation and stimulus to further thinking, but would not be able to sustain the claims of thorough research. What I needed was a more mixed approach as I became more aware of the role of my own reflections in the evolution of the module. As much as I would have preferred to include student voice more, in reality this was not possible. The role of my observations during the module became more important, as I initiated changes in the sessions, for the most part explaining developments to each group of students, and I then had to observe what effect these changes had. When possible I would ask students for their feedback on activities, using questionnaires and informal questioning during sessions themselves, but again this could only be organic rather than systematic. This inevitably meant that the interpretation of changes was subjective and difficult to

authenticate, except by my own observations. Critical reflection became a consistent dimension in my understanding of practitioner research (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007; McNiff and Whithead, 2010; Drake and Heath, 2011; Baumfield, Hall and Wall, 2013), and I explored ethnography and ethnomethodology (Geertz, 1973; Woods, 1996) and self-study by teacher educators (Villegas and Lucas, 2002a; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Zeichner, 2007; Samaras and Freese, 2009) as ways of reflecting on and informing my thinking.

### **3.1.5 Ethnography and Ethnomethodology**

To examine and understand the processes which the students and I underwent, and deepen my understanding of different research methodologies, I considered it could be useful to build up a picture of the student group using ethnographic methods to identify and analyse the experiences, voices and processes undertaken to engage a sense of common teaching purpose (Woods, 1996; Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland and Lofland, 2001) (see Chapter 5). Ethnographic understanding, and in particular the work of Clifford Geertz, had been central to the development of the Interpretive Approach (Jackson, 1997), which encouraged me to consider exploring it further to recognise the group experiences of my students.

Both ethnography and ethnomethodology have insights to offer in the process of ordering and evaluating evidence and reflections made during my research episodes. The ethnographic site of my research was that of student teachers learning how to teach a specific subject. As such they form a cultural group and ethnography assists me in identifying them as a group and analysing their situation. Research requires direct observation and recognition of the situation we share, although it also requires me to recognise that not only am I immersed in the field situation, I am the main instrument of research and need to demonstrate a growing awareness of the process of observation in myself (Spindler, 1982, 154, cited in Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2001). I am both actor and observer in the processes I am researching, so Geertz's reflections on the interpretive role of the researcher are particularly helpful (Geertz, 1973). Although, as a cultural anthropologist, his fieldwork was among those with a greater cultural difference between the observer and the observed than I have in my study, he is reassuring that interpretation is at the centre of a researcher's understanding, so it is important that I consider both that which we have in common and that which holds us separate and use those lenses to construct an understanding of the students' situation.

Ethnomethodology provides ways of making sense of how the researched order their world. If ethnomethodology is used to consider the 'lived order' of teacher education (Maynard and

Clayman, cited in Pollner and Emerson, 2001, 119), there is the opportunity to reflect on meaning placed on language and behaviours met in this context. Ethnomethodology encourages observation of situated behaviours, and I had cohort after cohort of students operating in a similar situation in their training year after year. I could consider the taught sessions as sites of fieldwork, analysed to identify not only what was familiar and assumed by the group, but also how individuality and new ideas were recognised and accommodated through student interactions. Through iterative observation I became more able to identify different strands which impacted on teaching and learning, for example the different discussion dynamics within different groups, the way that anxieties manifested themselves when students were unsure if what they said might cause offence, or how individuals and groups would respond to representation of a religion through their own understandings. At times I could position myself as ethnographic researcher rather than teacher to identify the mix of assumptions, events and discussions which took place in seminars and interrogate why students responded in particular ways when particular issues arose. As teacher I sometimes led or modelled responses, but as researcher I sought to watch how responses evolved and recognise the patterning of negotiation the students entered into, sometimes before I intervened in or contributed to the dynamic.

Areas of commonality were identified through repetition of activities, and comparison between how different groups of students responded at different stages of their training. Reflective notes were made at the end of sessions and modules to capture the building of understandings among students and identify moments where *phronesis* had influenced interpretation. This proved particularly helpful when comparing BA students in their second year with PGCE students at the very beginning of their training and enabled me to identify moments of transition in students' understanding using *phronesis*. With BA students I was adding to a collective understanding, built up with other colleagues and through school experience. Teacher language was established and students could assume understanding between themselves over issues such as differentiation, planning and classroom management. They had a clearer understanding of classroom dynamics so more mature *phronesis* was repeatedly employed to re-contextualise activities and assess them for use in the classroom. With PGCE students I was introducing rather than confirming this understanding of education, so common reference points were fewer and students needed more guidance on how an activity might be used in the classroom, because their sense of *phronesis* was less

developed. They were requiring more general rules because their contextual understanding was less developed (Flyvberg, 2001).

Ethnographic positioning required me to reflect upon my own enculturation to identify my preconceptions and prejudices. Examples of this emerged over interpretations of the term 'prayer'. I became able to recognise how my Christian understanding both informed and distanced explanations of *salat*. Working with Muslim and Hindu students in the sessions enabled me to see how interpretations differed and I was then able to reconstruct my use of the term 'prayer' and see it from other perspectives, weakening my enculturated interpretation. As Geertz affirms, meaning is tied to content (Geertz, 1973), so reflecting on the content I had selected revealed the meaning I was generating of what RE was to me.

There was also a further consideration that if I adopted ethnographic positioning as a main focus, the ethical priorities of my role as teacher could be in tension with the intentions of the research. Ethnography provides a methodology for reflection and study of the situation, yet I could not 'describe rather than be a judge' (Gregory, 2005, xix). The ethics of my professional role tugged me in another direction; that of actor rather than recorder, as I could not merely stand still and look. Ethnography did not support me in my desire to effect change, even though it assisted in understanding the site of research better. My teaching role took precedence over my ethnographic research, and it was this tension which assisted me in moving to a form of practitioner research for the majority of the study.

### **3.1.6 Self-Study by teacher-educators**

Reading Loughran (2006) and understanding his thinking in relation to my own teaching had been part of my research since reading his and Korthagen's work (Korthagen, 2001) during the REDCo research. In 2011, I became increasingly aware that although I was using their thinking to inform my own, there was also a whole methodology which could be taken from their work and which could be used to underpin my thinking. This form of practitioner research, called self-study in teacher-education, is exemplified by the writings of Korthagen, 2001a; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Loughran, 2006; Russell and Loughran, 2007; Kosnick, 2000 and Zeichner, 2007. Zeichner's paper 'Accumulating Knowledge across Self-Studies in Teacher Education' demonstrates the growing body of work in this field. There has been an accumulation of individual research studies which has developed this methodology in the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) community. As Zeichner observes,

(2007), the studies do not necessarily relate directly to each other but they form a group of writings on the process of developing teacher education through self-study.

Samaras and Freese (2009) trace the roots of self-study back to teacher inquiry in the late 1980s and the rise of reflective practice using work such as Donald Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner* 1983, echoing back to John Dewey's work on reflection (Dewey, 1933). They distinguish self-study from action research by comparing the two approaches. Both 'inquire into problems situated in practice, engage in cycles of research, and systematically collect and analyse data to improve practice.' However self-study uses other methods such as 'personal history, narrative inquiry, reflective portfolios, memory work, or arts-based methods' (Samaras and Freese, 2009, 5).

Although I did not explore all these methods, the inclusion of personal history and narrative inquiry intrigued me. Rather like Pearce, (2005), I considered that I needed to understand myself further, before I could understand more about my research, because of the nature of the research questions which were evolving from analysing student comments. Feldman (2002, 971), cited in Samaras and Freese (2009), writes of self-study researchers who 'problematize their selves in their practice situations' in order to examine their beliefs or practice. Samaras and Freese explain the difference between the two approaches, as 'Action research is more about what the teacher does, and not so much about who the teacher is' (2009, 5).

There are issues related to adopting this group of work as a basis for my own thinking. Zeichner (2007) writes of the problems of defining terms and the use of a range of research methods which can lead to issues about validity, data-collection and analysis. He identifies that there are questions about the legitimacy or credibility of this type of research and, as much of the material is to be found in edited books, there tends to be an emphasis on methodology rather than what is learned.

Although I recognise these issues as substantial and perhaps deleterious to the acceptance of my own ideas, the attractiveness of this way of working was considerable.

Firstly, my studies are very much situated in my work. This is a shared characteristic of action research and self-study research (Samaras and Freese, 2009). There may be opportunities to develop broader claims, but the conclusions will always be specific to the circumstances of my research. Secondly, adopting this methodology enables me to establish



my own meanings and analysis, as well as testing out a range of methods. Self-Study research is open to a range of research methods, including reflection and reflective practice, problematizing, qualitative research, biographical forms of enquiry and life history (Samaras and Freese, 2009). As Loughran states, 'There is no one way to do self-study' (Loughran, 2007,15).

Secondly, La Boskey points a way forward, that of trustworthiness, although it also increases ethical demands in that,

Self-study is self-initiated and focused: it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative methods and it defines validity as a validation process based in trustworthiness

(La Boskey, 2004, 817, cited in Samaras and Freese, 2009, 9)

Seeking validity, both in the internal dynamics of the research and in relation to wider research is a constant issue, as meta-interpretation needs to be employed to ensure that personal bias is recognised, and, if appropriate, counteracted. Trusting one's own judgement needs to be a rigorous process of recognising personal interpretation, and methodology needs to be honestly explained to create trust in others critiquing the research.

Thirdly, on a practical level, attempts to obtain meaningful samples of research among students had been problematic from the start, leading to a range of different types of evidence and a risk of confusing understandings through a range of methodologies chosen because of difficulties rather than systematically. By engaging with self-study methodology I was more able to examine and articulate the problems I was encountering through the research and recognise that changing methods to introduce a new angle on the research was not unacceptable, as long as there was validity in the decision-making and an internal dialogue which recognised that complexity was developed through this means.

In teacher-educators' self-study I found echoes of what I have wanted to know for years and also validation of methodologies I had started to construct, but had been concerned about in terms of their rigour or appropriateness. Cochran-Smith (2003) talks of 'what teacher educators need to know and do' (2003, 5) and explores the importance of inquiry as the appropriate stance. She outlines the problem of teacher educators who have not primarily been seen as researchers but who 'are now expected to conduct and publish research at the same time that they develop curricula and programs, teach courses, and work with school-based teachers' (Zimpher and Sherill, 1996, cited in Cochran-Smith, 2003, 6).

These aspects of self-study had strong resonance in my own thinking and encouraged me to build my methodology under the umbrella term of practitioner research, using self-study as a way forward, though mindful of the problems of claims made using this method. It was at this stage in the research that I wrote the first iteration of the context section in Chapter 1. The personal background section enabled me to identify my own background and intentions which, once expressed, could be recognised in the research. McNiff and Whitehead (2010, 9) refer to the humility and vulnerability of the action researcher in placing themselves as part of the research process, but through reflection, I came to recognise that I needed to shed the idea that research was only valuable if conducted in standardised ways, following a methodological brief, even if this increased my vulnerability to criticism.

The ‘rich dialectic’ referred to in the following quotation seemed an area which I could inhabit and explore. Cochran- Smith asks for

...a reconceptualization of the role of teacher educator ... This new role privileges neither scholarship nor practice but instead depends upon a rich dialectic of the two wherein the lines between professional practice in teacher education, on the one hand, and research related to teaching and teacher education, on the other, are increasingly blurred. (Cochran-Smith 2003, 9)

She also suggests ‘that working from an inquiry stance is a complex and recursive process with built-in difficulties and contradictions as well as consequences that are sometimes unintended.’ (2003, 9) so I did not expect this to be a straightforward methodology with which to work. The blurring of lines echoed with my developing understanding of *phronesis* and also reminded me of Jackson’s ‘fuzzy edges’ when studying religions (Jackson, 2004, 87). My understanding of hermeneutics developed through perceiving the role of interpretation as central to each of these areas and methods, and a model of complex interpretation was beginning to emerge which could allow for multiple and flexible positionality. Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg had discussed the concept of *bricolage* in a Critical Pedagogy seminar I attended at Middlesex University on 16th October, 2008. Here they made it very clear that combining methodologies required a mature understanding of what each contained and could achieve. Kincheloe described *bricoleurs* as ‘boundary workers’ producing a conversation which is transformative. He envisaged this as a breakdown and reconstruction of multi-disciplinary thinking into intra-disciplinary thinking. This seminar provided an early paradigm shift in my thinking and encouraged me to continue researching methodologies to develop ways of understanding interpretation. By 2011, I could not claim the depth of knowledge of research methods to establish *bricolage* as my over-arching methodology, but

Kincheloe's emphasis on using methodologies as tools rather than as complete structures encouraged me to see the benefits of relaxing the boundaries of my research models to enable ideas from other methods to assist my thinking. To counter my concerns about research vulnerability, I continued the iterations of questionnaires to maintain the students' voices and started to create triangulation opportunities where possible. My biographical context, for example, provided a point from which I could chart and compare my own developing understandings.

### **3.2 Ethical considerations**

Educational research creates ethical decisions for any researcher, but those raised by practitioner research are complex. When the subjects of research are people with whom you have a working relationship on a daily basis outside of the research, it is particularly important to consider the value of the research, the relationships between those researched and researcher, and the audience and use made of the research once the process has been completed (Drake and Heath, 2011).

One of the primary concerns is that the benefit outweighs the potential harm to those relationships (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Who will ultimately gain from the research in terms of the academic community, me and my students? I considered that the academic community of RE researchers, lecturers and teachers would derive benefit from a study focused on an area which has not had a high profile in RE research. The education of non-specialist student teachers in primary RE is not a well-researched area; partly because it is difficult to research because of its diversity and fragmentation in terms of national understandings and partly because the nature of much RE research is on the nature and delivery of the subject in schools, rather than to ITE students. There is no common agreement on what should be taught in primary ITE RE modules, how it should be taught and or even how much it should be taught; so a study into one HEI provider can create opportunities for comparison and criticism. By highlighting this area, I am raising the potential for it to be considered in more depth.

The benefit to me is one of supported and sustained engagement in considering a real problem, raised by my teaching situation, and a subject and pedagogical focus which assists me through informing all my teaching. The benefits for the student are more speculative. It has been considered that students benefit from knowing that their teachers are involved in research, but they can also be resentful if they consider researching takes priority over

teaching. Students may feel valued by their opinions being asked. They may also value an opportunity to articulate, either individually or as a group, their own ideas about a subject they may find challenging. Alternatively they may find the process of answering questions is intrusive and may feel disempowered by finding it difficult to refuse one of their lecturers asking them to participate in research. In this study, these issues have been considered and countered by students being informed orally and in writing about the nature and reason for my research, asked if they wish to participate, assured of anonymity, given options to withdraw from participation and learning about the impact of previous research on the module they are receiving.

In order that the students did not feel compromised or mistook participation as a 'hidden and unspoken benefit' (Drake and Heath, 2011, 54), all students were included in the questionnaires at the beginning and end of the module. This enabled me to overcome the issue of students feeling specially related to the research through selecting a sample of students when collecting data.

The location of research which involved students as subjects in this study has predominantly been at the university in shared teaching spaces, with some research performed in schools and individual interviews done in places where students would not feel the lecturer had dominance. Examples are school classrooms and staffrooms, a student's own home and on one occasion a quiet café, as this was convenient for the student.

Data collection has been through written questionnaires, taped and transcribed interviews and through permitted analysis of student assignments. Where research have failed to provide the information I consider valuable to my research, the methodology has been reviewed and re-focused on my own reflections, rather than risk gaining data which could be suspect and in any way prejudicial or misrepresentative of the students' own positions. Consent has been gained through oral and written means. Schools have been informed of the nature of research which I have undertaken in classrooms or with student teachers through letters, emails and meetings.

Ethical decision-making is influenced by the ontology of the researcher (Miles and Huberman, 1994; McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). Using an interpretive position in my research means that I see reality as constructed through language and shared meanings and experienced through the interpretation of individuals and groups. In ethical terms, this influences my thinking about what is meant by 'ethical' and how that may be interpreted by

others as well as myself. There are certain values which I endeavour to espouse in my research; those of truth, justice and care, and advice on ethical issues has been taken (BERA, 2011; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Drake and Heath, 2011), but I need to acknowledge that my understanding of these terms is also influenced through my past experiences and reflections and may not be interpreted in the same way by others. We are more likely to reach a common usage of these terms through mutual negotiation and reference to common understandings.

Teaching is an ethical profession. Teachers are the arbiters of children's experience of justice at school and they are trusted to behave in ethically appropriate ways (General Teaching Council (GTC), 2009; DfE, 2011b). My ethical position has developed from that of being a teacher in school because that is my past experience, which has then been modified by being a teacher educator. Some aspects have strong resonance, such as care for the students for whom I am responsible. Although the students are adults and therefore care in respect for minors is not required, in reality I frequently see the students as vulnerable at the beginning and at various times during their courses and am careful to consider if my research has the potential to cause undue pressure on them as they mature into their professional role.

When embarking on research with students for whom I am professionally responsible, there is a need to consider how I view them in relation to the research and in what ways there are differences between their role as students and their role as those who are researched. I also need to decide which of these roles dominate in my relationship with the students and what impact that has on the nature and quality of the research. Reflection has clarified for me that my interactions are dominated by my professional responsibility. This may be because it is the most experienced understanding that I have and therefore is my default position, but dilemmas which have arisen have shown me that I have greater peace of mind when resolving problems through a professional rather than a researcher lens, if the two require different decisions, even though this might influence the direction of the research.

An example of this issue arose in 2011, when I attempted to develop the students' agency in the module by asking for feedback from students about the sessions directly after they had occurred. The intention was to ask students to reflect on the learning and identify what they felt worked for them, what they would like more of and how they understood their own development in RE. My intention was to build their reflections into the following session, so that they could identify their voices in my teaching, and to model how learners'

understandings could be supported in the classroom. Again all students were asked to consider contributing their feedback, but in practice only a very small number became involved. Although I was attempting to develop elements of student voice and empowerment, which I considered would be more in keeping with action research methodology, I discovered that the process I had developed created ethical issues which I had not foreseen.

Until that point, the research process had been designed to intrude as little as possible on the students' experience of the module, because the timing of the module is demanding and teaching time is short. I also had not wanted to complicate my students' understanding of RE by introducing a dominating researching dynamic in the sessions.

During this iteration I decided to ask students to feedback between sessions so that I could adjust sessions during the module. This was for two reasons:

1. So that I could demonstrate shared dynamic and democratic principles I wanted students to understand
2. So that I could get recorded feedback to create evidence of student voice rather than just my perceptions

(reflection on student feedback during the 2011 iteration, 20 July 2011)

I asked students for feedback on specific aspects of each session, but struggled with ways of collecting material which would preserve anonymity. At first I thought feedback might be written and handed in at the end of the session, but individual students preferred to reflect on each session and use email to respond to the areas identified for comment. Email would identify the participant, so another member of staff was used as the gatekeeper for email returns. My sensitivities as researcher proved to be more acute than those of the students, who were happy to tell me what they thought, but found the process of anonymised emails too complex. We maintained the gatekeeper method using email for four sessions, with sharply diminishing returns and it was not repeated the following year.

This experience caused me to rethink student involvement for two reasons: firstly the dynamic of asking questions session by session was not as successful as I had anticipated, because it altered the dynamics in my classroom. I was no longer solely their teacher, but they became conscious of my research role and became confused as to how to respond helpfully. Secondly, the areas I had identified for feedback proved interesting to me, but did not produce data at the level of reflection I had hoped for. My concerns were that students were now being asked to reflect at a level which they found different from their customary way of working and this interfered with their developing understanding of RE. They were

used to participating in seminars and learning about the subject studied and the pedagogies which were appropriate to deliver those subjects in school. When asked to reflect on their personal learning process they became puzzled, because they wanted to assist, but were not sure how, and I did not have enough time in the sessions to discuss this reflexive development with them. Confusion over aspects of learning in the module created a risk that students might be less successful in the assignment than previously. This concerned me as an ethical issue because it could both impact on the classification of their degree and risk influencing their attitudes to the subject when they became teachers. Until this point, feedback on the module was very positive and students succeeded in the assignment in line with other modules, but it would be ethically wrong to risk the students' degree prospects because they were penalised by a change in the module's delivery. My questions were steeped in the research paradigm I was working in, but their responses were inhibited by a lack of experience in participating in research. Although I could argue that theoretically students benefitted from engagement in research, in practice any extra dimensions of research which took time from the teaching of the module were inappropriate and risked increasing students' anxiety.

Reflection from 2011 indicates the resolution of the problem through adjusting the research method. This, perhaps, has some resonance with Schön's discussion of 'aesthetic appeal' (Schön, 1986) although for Schön, the quality of the decision is one of beauty rather than ethical contentment. I am reflecting a more humanistic than artistic resolution, through seeing decision-making as addressing difficulties presented through human relationships. Kinsella and Pitman (2012, 48-49) reflects that Schön's writing does not reflect ethical decision-making as much as that of Dewey's, and proposes the idea of 'ethical imperatives' which I recognise more clearly in my own decision-making.

Drake and Heath, (2011) and Kinsella and Pitman (2012) have proved particularly helpful in reflecting on this issue, through their consideration of situated ethics. They explore *phronesis* as an appropriate concept when considering the tensions between professional and researcher decisions because it reflects an immediacy and fluidity which the practitioner can use to negotiate between his/her various roles, and recognises nuanced decision-making, responding to the issues as they arise through reference to both deontological and consequential ethical positions. Kinsella's extension of Schön's theory of reflective practice (Schön, 1983, 1987; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012, 47-50) reinforces the interpretive and decisive nature of

reflection- in-action and how *phronesis* both in the moment and after the moment influences ethical decision-making through its reference to past knowledge and experience.

As a result of this experience I reconsidered my methodology, continued with practitioner research and sought fewer formal opportunities to interrogate students' understandings, reverting to module feedback forms, with which the students were familiar. The ethical dilemma of asking more of the students than they understood was therefore resolved by a return to my professional teaching persona, even though this meant I forfeited opportunities to receive feedback, because I considered that it was more important for the students to have a positive experience of RE and an engagement with the pedagogies and activities developed in the module than for me to receive what proved to be suspect data. The only year students questioned the relationship between my teaching and my research was that year. All other feedback was positive, indicating that although they were interested to know what I was researching, they found it troubling to be involved in the process itself. I also, belatedly, recognised that asking students to help me understand the processes they were experiencing was too ambitious, because of their lack of research experience and a lack of understanding of what constituted evidence. If, as was necessary, I was to deepen my understandings of process, I would resolve my ethical dilemma by reflecting more deeply on my own.

### **Researching a small sample of students in school**

Another site of potential ethical risk was that of visiting students in school, which took place in 2008 and 2014. Visits were modelled on university link tutor visits to observe students, which takes place during every school experience. By replicating, as far as possible, that experience, less strain was placed on the students because they understood that process. Link tutors and school mentors were consulted before I requested to do an observation. Students were only seen after I had established that they were achieving well on a placement, because of the risk of introducing a further observation which might be interpreted as judgemental on their general progress. Teaching practice can, by its nature, be a particularly stressful time for students, so relationships with the class, school mentor and link tutor all needed to be secure before I could intrude on the training. In practice this meant that students could not be observed until after the mid-point of the practice, reducing the opportunities available to see them. Thus the care of students was prioritised over my research requirements.

As a result of ethical deliberations I had a further understanding to consider as I developed my understanding of practitioner research. How might it change the role of the students in my



research? Action research encourages participants to be seen as collaborators, but, with the change to practitioner research, were they now collaborators, participants or subjects of research? If they were collaborators, then they should have agency in the nature and interpretation of research through that collaboration. Even if the dynamic of research is not equal between the researcher and his/her collaborators, agency is implied. If however those who are researched were considered participants, they have less agency, although they are involved in the process of the research. Subjects could be defined as the least empowered of these three participatory roles as they can be subjected to elements of research in which they have had no say in terms of design or interpretation. When I started with action research I considered that students and I could create a more egalitarian relationship where we both shared in ownership of the learning. It later became clearer to me that I needed to reconsider the relationship between researcher and researched. Collaboration was not achieved in the way I had hoped, partly because of the limited opportunity to develop collaborative understandings with the students in a short module and partly because through ethnographic positioning I came to understand better the issues faced by students during their training. If I wanted to improve the students' agency through my research, I needed to identify new sites in their training where they could reconsider ideas met in the RE module and embed them in their more general understanding of teaching.

### **3.3 Methods**

This section of the chapter examines the different methods used during the research to create, analyse and reflect on data and develop understandings from the research process. It explains the sequence, duration and organisation of different methods, their use in creating and interrogating research questions and reaching conclusions in the research.

#### **3.3.1 Entry Questionnaires**

In 2006, an initial questionnaire was designed to be asked of students for the REDCo research project. The questions were based on personal observations and annual student module feedback from 2002-2005. During that time students had indicated a range of attitudes towards the module, (mostly positive, with some negatives about RE's place in the curriculum), so the opportunity to research this more formally in relation to the interpretive approach was welcomed. An entry questionnaire was designed with a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions so that some data sets could be developed and more individual comments noted and analysed. The REDCo research was intended to last for two years, but

when I designed the questionnaire I was unsure at the outset what would prove most useful in terms of questions. I was not setting out to prove a hypothesis but to ask genuinely open questions to assist in discovering what I could through the research. The initial questionnaire therefore included a range of questions on student opinions, their school experiences and their concerns. Through gaining a fuller picture of what they thought, and what was happening in partnership schools, I hoped I would be able to better understand the situations my students encountered and adapt my teaching, so that I could reflect on the possible impact of the Interpretive Approach in developing their understanding and approach to teaching RE.

In administering a questionnaire at the beginning of the module, there was a risk that the students' trust in the questioner might not be established (Miles and Huberman, 1994), but this was seen as less problematic with Year 2 students, as I already knew them from teaching Citizenship in an earlier, Year 1 Humanities module. This in itself could also be a factor in analysis, as these previous experiences with me might influence their responses and mine, but I had not taught them for over a year, during which time their understanding of teaching had developed through two school experiences.

Each year, from 2007-2012, the first phase of research was to gather information from the students about their understanding of RE before the Year 2 module commenced. Everyone present at the first session of the module had an opportunity to complete an individual, written questionnaire which was designed to provide opportunities for open feedback. A questionnaire method was selected because it gave an opportunity to collect individualised data from everyone in a relatively short time, everyone could express an opinion and recognised that it was of interest to me, individual views were captured for later analysis and the momentum of the first session was not overly disrupted. If co-construction of knowledge was to take place within the module, this information was intended to help me identify key themes and concerns which could be revisited in subsequent sessions (Munn and Drever, 1999).

Using questionnaires also meant that I generated over 95% responses for the data sets; all students who were present were involved, so that there was no issue about selecting a representative sample from the responses. Students who chose not to participate, did so having seen the questionnaire. Absentees were not followed up as this could compromise the promised anonymity and, pragmatically, data needed to be analysed quickly between the first and second sessions. The students were given individual questionnaires on one side of A4

paper with spaces to record answers beneath each question. They were asked to record their attitudes to religious education, their expectations of the module and what concerns and experiences they might have had about teaching the subject. The questionnaire was completed at the beginning of the teaching session independently and silently to avoid influence from others in the room.

As can be seen below, all questions, except one, were designed to obtain students' opinions, so they were worded to raise an issue but not give any indication of an expected or preferred answer. I recognised that as I administered the questionnaire, this might bias their responses, so administration was kept to a minimum. I aimed to obtain standardised information through offering everyone in the group the same stimulus (Munn and Drever, 1999). The same methodology was used each year. Questionnaires were deliberately not counted when returned until after the session and the collection itself was done by students so that if a student did not submit they were not identified by me. In practice almost all students in the cohort returned completed questionnaire every year (except 2011 when only one group's data was collected because of administration difficulties), so the percentage of responses was always over 95%, resulting in 279 returns over six years.

### **The structure of the entry questionnaire**

The first questionnaire, used from 2007-2009, asked the students for the following information:

1. What are your views on Religious Education being taught in British primary schools?
2. What are your views on Religious Education being part of your initial teacher education course?
3. What do you expect to be in a Religious Education initial teacher education course?
4. What do you hope might be included in an RE training course?
5. Have you had any experience of teaching RE on SE1 / SE2?
6. If Yes, please give details of year group and a brief description of the topic or content
7. Do you have concerns about teaching RE personally? Yes/No
8. If Yes, please describe the concerns you have.

(initial questionnaire, 2007)

In order to be able to see what kind of impact the module had, it was important to gather student opinions before the module began, as a baseline for comparison and to discover if there were any issues which needed to be addressed as part of the module.

The first two questions engage students through asking them to express their own opinions. Question 1 positioned RE as part of the primary curriculum and was designed to identify students' initial attitudes to RE, as these could be influenced by their own beliefs, previous experience and political, social or educational understandings. An example of such an issue from 2006-8 questionnaire responses was that of students expressing their opinion that RE should not be taught in school. When these comments arose (two each year for two years) I was able to discuss this issue in Session 2 so that the students had the opportunity to express their opinions and hear the views of others. The word British was used because it contextualised RE as a national issue, reminding the students that there are policy decisions to be considered with this subject, because it functions outside the National Curriculum.

Question 3 asks about their expectations of the RE module. I suspected that these would be influenced by their own education and wanted to look for dominant themes emerging, such as subject knowledge and teaching ideas. Issues raised could be revisited in the sessions and discussed further.

Question 4 was included to see if it generated a difference between expectations and hope, however, most students combined these questions by using arrows or 'ditto' marks on their question papers. From 2011/12 this question was removed, as it did not generate different information from that given in response to Question 3.

Questions 5 and 6 were included to build up a picture of how much opportunity students had to teach RE when on school experience. At this stage the students had just returned from their second block of training in schools. Question 5 was quantitative and question 6 qualitative to create data to capture experience. Question 6 was included because there could be considerable difference between students teaching one session and planning RE for a half term. What they taught, how often they taught it and to whom could influence their understandings and confidence in the subject. If most students had some experience of teaching RE, I could factor this into the sessions and move more quickly from beginner explanations to a more experienced teaching discourse earlier in the module. It also created an opportunity to monitor what they were teaching, for example thematic or systematic presentations of religions and topics, which might be favoured in different Agreed Syllabuses and key stages. Students were placed in a wide range of schools, including schools from at least six different Local Authorities (LAs), Anglican and Catholic Church schools, Hindu and Jewish schools, resulting in teaching based on a range of different Agreed Syllabuses. It

might be considered that by revealing details about their individual experiences, students could be concerned about confidentiality, but the responses were not used to track students or specific schools. If students wanted to discuss their experiences they talked publicly in the sessions or privately afterwards, and I was able to build up some ideas about individual schools through those contributions, rather than seeking them through analysis of the questionnaire data. Producing data about student experiences also gave me an opportunity to consider if the requirements for RE in the school experience handbooks should be strengthened. Students were expected to teach foundation subjects and RE in all placements, but if, as I suspected, some students had very little or no experience on their first two placements, a request to teach and observe more RE lessons could be included more generally and, for students with no experience, could be raised as a specific need for their final practice.

Questions 7 and 8 were included because this was information I wanted to respond to in the module as students' concerns emerged. Using the same questions over several years built up a better understanding of the cohorts' needs and anxieties, and also identified if there were any changes in responses in different years. It was important not to expect developments in attitude between cohorts, because I was not tracking the same students through the three years of their course. Each cohort needed to be regarded as students at a similar stage in their development. Any substantial differences between iterations would need to be interrogated carefully, before it could be assumed they might mean a change in understanding. The range of qualitative questions was designed to give examples of students' own attitudes to RE each year and enable me to address issues which arose from their answers in their sessions. In Question 7, I thought it particularly important to provide an opportunity for concerns to be recorded, although it could be argued that using the word 'concerns' implied problems or issues. The word was chosen to imply that RE is not a straightforward subject (QCA, 2004; Revell, 2005; Rivett, 2007) and that considering sensitivities and concerns was part of the module content. The word 'personally' was included in the question to act as a prompt, because I wanted students to think carefully about their own position, thereby giving them an opportunity to be reflective, knowing that the questionnaire was anonymous and therefore it was not questioning their competence.

## Analysing initial questionnaire data

Each year a new set of data was generated and analysed. I developed a simple and flexible process for analysing data, because the majority of questions were open-ended and could generate different types of answers from the students. Each set of questionnaires was analysed question by question using a tally system (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). Each new comment a student made under each question was recorded, if it were a new idea, or tallied alongside students' similar comments. This system was used to give equal weight to each comment rather than equal weight to each student. Some students would make three or four comments, others only one and it would be inaccurate to select only one of a number of comments to give weight to in a student-weighted tally system. An example is:

1. What are your views on religious education being taught in British primary schools?

This would be scored from a student response as:

I think it is **good** that RE is taught in schools because it is **important** for children to understand different religions.

and would be tallied for each comment highlighted in red.

Student responses: Important 1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1 =17

Good 1+1+1+1+1+1+1=7 (2007, Question 1 tally chart)

The words 'good' and 'important' carry different meanings, but in the student responses it was not always clear if the words had been chosen to reflect virtue or significance, so in analysis the two words remained together in the text and both possibilities are noted.

The advantage of this system was that it could be replicated easily each year and awareness of student voice could be maintained. There was one year when it was not possible to collect complete data sets from all groups, and my research had to give way to prioritise student tuition. This shows in the data for 2011. All the data sets are from between 50-57 students except this set, which is from 24 students. Percentages were used for consistency across the years, however if there proved to be an anomaly, other factors were considered which might have influenced this result. Differences in student numbers are recorded on the Timeline of Research (pp.5-6). It could be argued that greater weight is given to a smaller number of responses in a year through percentages, but as responses are tallied by comment rather than the number of students for questions 1, 2, 3/4 combined and 8, percentages provide a consistent method of demonstrating student response, by recording the percentage of times

that issue was raised or comment was made, rather than by adjusting to the number of students who raised it. On these questions percentages add up to more than 100%, whereas on questions 5 and 7 the percentages reflect the number of students, as each student responded to these quantitative questions with only one response.

After tallying the students' responses to note the issues they raised, the individual comments for each student were reconsidered, looking for differences in approach, nuance or tone and noting comments which raised new issues or a different opinion or experience. Trends were noted and were kept available as a list during the module sessions so that areas identified by the students could be raised at appropriate times in my teaching. As the amount of data grew year on year, I was able to inform students of repeated trends during the module, so that they could understand how I was using the data to inform my teaching. All data were kept in the original paper form so that they could be re-examined to check for any themes which emerged later, but had not been apparent to me during the first analysis.

Questions 6 and 7 required further analysis at the end of data collection, because it was not clear if the data were indicating significant trends or not. Once it had been established how many students had had experience in SE1 and SE2, the information given for Questions 6 and 7 was compared to data from Question 4. The data sets were re-examined to see if the types of concerns noted by the students changed. For example, was subject knowledge an equal concern among all groups of students, whether or not they had taught any RE, or did subject knowledge concern increase or decrease as a result of experience. The data sets were only able to indicate possible trends, as experience for a student might mean teaching one lesson or teaching a scheme of work. This could impact on their confidence depending on the positive or negative experience they had and on the stage of their training. If the experience was in their first year, they would have less proficiency as a teacher because they are at the beginning of their training. If the experience had been more recently in SE2, then their perception of that practice might dominate their recall of the experience of teaching RE and influence their comments.

### **Reflection on using questionnaires**

The choice to use an initial questionnaire from 2006-2012 was influenced by several factors at the beginning of the research. As I was researching my own practice, I needed a practical way to capture information before the beginning of the module, which could then be used to influence my teaching. A questionnaire seemed suitable in that it was essentially practical, it

developed knowledge shared between the students and me and was intended to be the first steps towards the students' understanding RE as a reflective subject. The questionnaire was composed of mostly open questions, because I wanted to capture and respect the views of my participants; however, the process of initial analysis could be seen as demonstrating aspects of post-positivist thinking. I felt drawn to generate data which could 'prove my position', whatever that turned out to be. This reflects the attraction of scientific understandings of research which require providing a burden of proof (Wellington *et al.*, 2005), although I was not able to see that pressure on my thinking at the beginning. Despite being attracted to interpretivist understandings, I felt more secure if I also generated concrete data which could be understood by readers, especially from other countries with different experiences of RE. Reading Miles and Huberman assisted in articulating these tensions when they discussed the 'multiple overlaps' between researcher positions in the 'actual practice of empirical research' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, 4-5). This resonated with the reality of competing factors when designing my research structure and I felt that some concrete data would assist in triangulating my position as a researcher. Pragmatic factors which influenced me were: a very limited time with my students, the number of students engaged in the process and concerns not to increase pressure unreasonably on the students.

In retrospect, I should have been more prepared from the outset to comment on the varying tensions I discovered when analysing data. As I became more experienced in reading the data I received each year, I began to understand that pursuing clarity of results should not also mean removing or ignoring the uncertainties the results demonstrated. A range of factors came into play each time I considered the data, which might not have been prompted if I had not had evidence to reflect on.

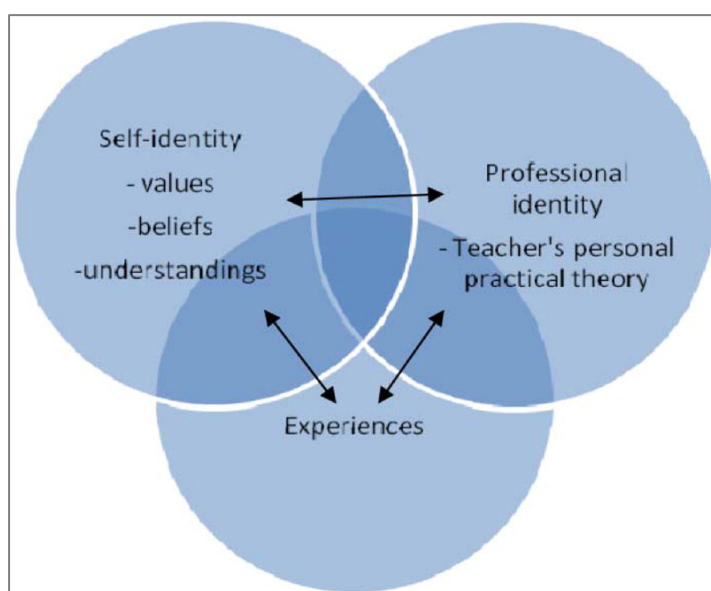
### **Thinking like a student**

I was also conscious that, although I had examples of student thinking through the questionnaire responses, these only started to capture their ideas. The exploratory language that they used in sessions varied from the shorter presentational comments they made in questionnaire responses. Some of this was captured through notes taken at the time, but I became increasingly aware of expectations of empathy which were shared among the group. They sought reassurance through inviting empathy from their listeners with phrases such as 'Do you understand what I mean? Do you see where I'm coming from with this?' Considering empathetic responses to a situation runs a considerable risk of making



assumptions about students' private thoughts, yet expectations of empathy influenced the ways that students spoke to each other and to me and underpinned their willingness to engage with questionnaires. They expected positive responses from me, so felt able to speak and write quite freely, demonstrating trust in the listeners/ reader of their comments.

One exercise I undertook to identify influences and my own preconceptions about the students' thinking as a result of SE, was to imagine what background questions could influence their responses when asked the entry questionnaire. This exercise was influenced by Geertz's 'thick descriptions', (1973, 9) which in this case was considering the possible impact of previous experiences beyond the specific site of research which might influence the students' responses. 'Thinking like a student' was a reflective attempt by me to position myself 'in their shoes' so that I considered more specifically the personal as well as professional understandings they had formed through the SE they had recently experienced and which would be uppermost in their minds during the module. Stenberg, (2010) expresses the interplay between students' professional and personal identities and recognises the importance of reflection in the students' development of their teaching personae. I took this a stage further by using my reflection to assist me in considering my personal and professional lenses, as well as encouraging students to reflect themselves.



*Figure 3.2 - Connections and interplay between teacher's personal and professional identity (Stenberg, 2010, 334)*

This developed as an ethnographic reflection on what characterised the group I was researching and how I might develop empathetic understanding which resonated in the space between my thinking and theirs (Jackson, 1997).

| Professional influences which could impact on responses to the questionnaire  | Personal influences which could impact on responses to the questionnaire   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was SE successful?</li> <li>• Did I agree with my grade and targets?</li> <li>• How has my understanding of teaching developed?</li> <li>• How do I understand the relationship between activities and learning?</li> <li>• Did any incidents happen while in school which mean I had to reconsider my understanding of teaching, including: meetings with parents, managing conversations with colleagues, incidents with children, promoting school ethos, teaching values?</li> <li>• What experiences did I have of children's different backgrounds, bi- and multilingualism, cultural and religious identity?</li> <li>• What happened in RE on SE?</li> <li>• If I taught it, did it increase my understanding about teaching RE, what did I learn?</li> <li>• If it was not a successful lesson, has this put me off teaching RE?</li> <li>• Have I identified the reasons for my judgement on my experience of teaching RE?</li> <li>• If I didn't teach it- do I now feel disadvantaged, anxious?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did I feel supported by staff on SE or has my self-esteem been dented?</li> <li>• What is my attitude to religion/s?</li> <li>• What do I think about RE?</li> <li>• Was it a good subject for me in my schooling?</li> <li>• What did I learn from it?</li> <li>• What do I believe and how does that relate to being a teacher?</li> <li>• What is my identity and world view and do I feel able to talk about them?</li> <li>• What influences me when I reflect on culture and religion, family attitudes, attitudes and experiences of and with friends, where I live, languages I speak.</li> <li>• What experience do I have of religious and non-religious celebrations?</li> <li>• What do I think about multiculturalism?</li> <li>• What assumptions do I make about the lecturer?</li> <li>• Do I expect Christianity to be the dominant religion in RE?</li> </ul> |

*Figure 3.3- Thinking like a student*

This exercise reminded me of the complexities students carry with them when studying to become a teacher and the dominance of SE in their professional formation as teachers. The intellectual and personal lenses they employ in the experience of becoming qualified all need to be considered whenever they are taught, so that their diverse needs can be factored into the teaching and stereotypes avoided. Any data generated by a questionnaire could only be snapshots of their thinking at the time it was administered and should be treated as such. It can give indications but does not represent an absolute truth. The myriad of thoughts and emotions with which they daily engage means that asking them apparently simple questions can reveal very individual and complex responses, which need to be recognised in my

teaching. Their confidence as student teachers can be fragile and asking questions needs to be contextualised so they feel able to answer as honestly as possible at that moment.

### **Building the database**

The database generated by the entry questionnaires was used as one aspect of the research into student experience and it was continued for six years. It provided examples of student experience and voice, creating a baseline from which attitudes could be identified. Part of its function was to act as a point of triangulation for other forms of data (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; McNiff and Whitehead, 2011).

In 2010, I briefly considered changing the questionnaire into one with specific questions with responses using a five-level Likert scale, as that would give me focused data for comparison; but, on consideration, I decided to continue with the original questionnaire because, although quantitative data would give me a stronger data set, I would lose the students' individual voices and the dynamic of completing the questionnaire would change. In its current form, the questionnaire placed the students on a more equal level with me as they were empowered within the parameters of open questions to determine what they wished to say. Using a more structured questionnaire would pre-determine the areas I wanted information about more rigidly, would reduce the agency and vocabulary of the students in their answers and could lead students to make assumptions about what I considered important and respond accordingly.

### **3.3.2 Refocusing the Research**

Assessment of the research at the end of the REDCo project had enabled me to reconsider what I had discovered and what could be investigated further. The reasons for this reassessment were threefold:

- I was no longer researching with the support of the REDCo Community of Practice, which changed the dynamics of the research.
- The research analysis demonstrated the need to review the research assumptions and interrogate them in new ways
- Time factors changed for the research, as I was now planning to extend it for more iterative cycles.

The first consideration needed to be the original research questions:

- How could the Interpretive Approach be taught to non-specialist student teachers in a short course on religious education?

- How might it contribute to student teachers' understanding of teaching primary religious education?
- Could it assist student teachers in developing confidence in teaching religious education?

These research questions had helped me focus on the quality of understanding of the Interpretive Approach the students demonstrated in their assignments across different grades, but analysis indicated that I now needed to reconfigure my understanding of the use I made of the Interpretive Approach in the sessions and how the students related to it. Reflection encouraged me to identify where the emphasis of the Interpretive Approach lay in my teaching. The two early iterations both showed that I was regarding the Interpretive Approach as a fixed entity which should be transmitted in its entirety to students. This is indicated in the first research question. Ironically, I had been in danger of creating a reified version of the approach at the same time as wanting to progress beyond the reification of religions.

Although my interest lay in the approach, it had proved over-simplistic and over-ambitious to expect students to adopt it in their thinking wholesale. It became clear in my analysis that students were able to reproduce the three terms of 'representation', 'interpretation' and, to an extent, 'reflexivity', but most had not been able to demonstrate them in their planning and explain them in their rationales. The most successful element had been representation, because it resonated with students' own experiences more than the other two ideas. Marking the students' assignments had shown me that I needed to focus more on embedding the approach in classroom practice, thereby showing how it could influence pupils' understanding of RE. It was through engaging with students' *phronesis* about teaching that I considered I might change their understanding of RE and potentially encourage a transformative role in their understanding of teaching it.

The research questions were changed to emphasise the second and third questions. Instead of focusing on 'teaching' the approach, I moved to broader research questions:

- How do different elements of an RE module contribute to student teachers' understanding of teaching primary RE?
- Could these assist student teachers in developing confidence in teaching RE?

In 2009-10, I continued the initial questionnaire because it provided an immediate activity which focused students on the intentions and nature of the module and also provided data which could be tracked for trends in the students' cohorts. I also trialled an additional

questionnaire at the end of the module, reduced analysis of student assignments and conducted a small number of interviews with students to help focus my thinking.

### **Changes to Sampling**

I reconstructed the place of assignments in the research, because the type of data extracted from the assignments had not proved as useful as I had expected. Two years of analysis had indicated that analytical writing about the Interpretive Approach was limited, in part because the assignment was designed for the students' development, not to suit my research. Accessing data also played a part in this decision. Generating data through the initial questionnaires had proved unproblematic, because the students could complete them quickly and anonymously. The introduction of exit questionnaires was similar to module feedback and was used for that purpose as well as my research, so students were willing to share their thinking. Collecting assignments however posed a more complex problem. To comply with my own ethical stance, I only wanted to analyse assignments which students were prepared to share with me, but requesting work could also impact on my longer-term relationship with students during modules I now taught in their final year. I modified the way I collected a sample of assignments by identifying informative reflection as it emerged during marking. Scripts were then collected by contacting each student individually by email in the summer after their grades had been released, to explain the nature and focus of my research, give ethical assurances about confidentiality and anonymity and to ask if they were prepared for me to analyse their assignments further. If they agreed, they sent me an unmarked copy of the assignment by email, which I could save electronically. Some students preferred not to submit their assignments and their decisions were respected.

### **3.3.3 Small scale research**

In 2009, I followed the three students who were interviewed in the earlier research into their classrooms to understand how the introduction to the Interpretive Approach might influence their delivery of RE in the classroom. All three students were enthusiastic to participate further. The system of university support for schools and students on school practice was one of link tutors who visited the schools to do joint observations and check the students' teaching. This meant that the students needed to become embedded with their classes and link tutors confident that they were predicted to pass the practice before any research could take place. The students, school mentors, class teachers and link tutors were all contacted to ensure there were no outstanding issues with the students, so that additional observations by

me would not be problematic or seen as intrusive. All three students were placed in Key Stage 2 classrooms. One Year 3 and one Year 6 class were in multicultural schools in North London and another Year 3 class was in a school north of London, which had a mostly mono-cultural white intake. I was able to see Isobel three times in school, Naina twice and Michael once (all names are pseudonyms).

In reality there were considerable issues raised by this attempt at research. Although the students were on their longest placement, I had to wait until they were established before I could contact schools. I had a professional duty of care as a tutor, and in one case as link-tutor, not to detrimentally influence the outcome of their teaching practice, as this was their final practice before qualification (see discussion in ethics section in Chapter 3). Once in school, the attitudes to RE of the class teachers became more significant, as were the ages of the children being taught. Through discussions with the students it was apparent that RE had different status in all three schools.

Each student was asked to meet with me at the school to discuss their lesson planning. This gave me the opportunity to meet with school staff and discuss the reasons for the research. Isobel was teaching Islam to a Year 6 multi-cultural class, including Muslim pupils, Naina was teaching Sikhism to Year 4 mono-cultural class and Michael was teaching the Hindu Tradition to a Year 3 class in a multi-cultural school. With each student I discussed learning objectives, subject knowledge and each activity to be undertaken with the pupils. Following observations of the lessons, I discussed each session with each student and made reflective notes.

Researching with these three students made me more conscious of the complexity of student collaboration. Their individual voices made me more aware of the students' diversity in understanding the Interpretive Approach and I recognised that I needed to listen to their thinking if I wanted to work collaboratively with them. Also, they were in a vulnerable position because of the pressures on them to succeed on their final school experience. My research in their classroom placed an added demand of asking them to prepare what, to them and their mentors, was a minor subject, while they were honing skills in the core curriculum subjects. One teacher was very unsupportive about her student taking time to plan RE, and, despite the student's enthusiasm to teach the lesson, made this very clear to me. So although this research was valuable for me, I needed to weigh up these issues and ensure that the students came to no harm though my research.

I made further visits to schools in 2014, following two PGCE students on their final practices, to consider how much their teaching reflected the Interpretive Approach and, through debriefing, interrogate the difference between their understandings from the module and the experience they had of RE. As this was a very small sample, it contributed by informing my reflections, but generated little data to be analysed.

### **3.3.4 The exit questionnaire**

In 2010, I created a pilot exit questionnaire for the last session of the module.

1. In what ways has your knowledge of religions been developed?
2. In what ways has your understanding of how to teach religions developed?
3. How important are the attainment targets in helping to develop your RE teaching and why?
4. What types of teaching/pedagogies do you think are particularly important in Religious Education?
5. Why do you think they are important?
6. Two stars and a wish..... (a common format to ask for feedback in primary classrooms which identifies two aspects which have gone well and one which could be developed or improved)

Students were still strongly influenced by the group dynamic around them and therefore were able to reflect on what they had learned together. Again individual questionnaires were used.

In the first year only one group in the cohort was involved, as I wanted to trial the questionnaire I had devised to see what kinds of data the students could give me. It was administered in a similar way to the entry questionnaire, paper copies were given to each student, completed individually and returned anonymously. Students were reminded that they did not have to make a return. Only students present at the final session were asked to complete the survey. In practice the percentage of returned questionnaires reduced from the number returned during the first session. This may have been due to more absenteeism by the end of term, or the timing of the questionnaire which was completed at the end of the final session. This meant that students who did not want to participate had an easier mechanism to avoid returning their answers, that of leaving quickly.

The administration of the pilot exit questionnaire occurred at the same time as I was beginning to consider the balance between research and teaching in the module. That it was unresolved at this point can be seen by Questions 1 and 2, which indicates my division between subject knowledge and teaching, because that was what I wanted to know at that stage. It was only when I analysed the responses to this questionnaire that I was able to

identify and articulate the problem about balance and redesign the questionnaire for the following year. In hindsight I recognised the questionnaire was steering the students towards some very specific responses. For example, it would be unusual if, in Question 4, students identified pedagogies I had not taught them during the module and the reasons given for their importance in Question 5 could simply echo the reasons I had given them myself. The most open question was Question 6, where they could choose what to write about. By asking Questions 1-5 in this way I was reinforced a division of which they may not be as aware, and was seeking affirmation of the impact of the module rather than researching the students' understandings. Results and analysis of this questionnaire are discussed in the Findings chapter, where further iterations of the exit questionnaire are discussed.

I devised this questionnaire at the time when I was questioning the nature of action research. The REDCo structure of research had finished and I needed to analyse how research could be continued and in what form. My analysis of the students' initial questionnaire responses up to this point had indicated a division between subject knowledge and practical teaching which I wanted to consider more deeply and I identified, as a result of my reflections on the previous modules from 2006-2009, that I was particularly interested in investigating the space between what I knew I had taught on the module and what the students considered they had learned. A specific gap became evident when I marked assignments, as some students used terms which we had used in sessions, (such as Attainment Targets, phenomenology, experiential) but were not using them accurately and did not understand their implication in RE. There was a risk that I was using terms and understandings which were common currency in RE literature, but not common in terms of student teachers' understandings and therefore I was unrealistic in my expectations and needed to reconsider the structure and teaching level of the module. Was I at risk of prioritising teaching the Interpretive Approach over the practical needs of the students by increasing the theoretical elements of the module when students were not at that stage in their understanding, or were they perceiving the concepts but not communicating them appropriately?

### **Changes in methods during 2011 - Student feedback during the 2011 iteration**

The nature of the research also changed during 2010-11 as I started teaching on the Inclusive Practices module for Year 3 undergraduates. This meant I was now teaching the Year 2 students who I last saw for RE, enabling me to see the RE module as a stepping stone to understanding inclusion. Until this point I had been a specialist RE teacher introducing and



exploring the world of RE with non-specialist students. The change was to recognise that the RE module had more to do in preparing primary students to teach than providing knowledge and understanding in RE; it could also be influential in the development of students' concepts, values and perceptions, in particular in the areas of intercultural understanding and social justice.

By 2011 I had redesigned the exit questionnaire, which was given to the whole cohort.

1. Which elements of the RE course have been what you anticipated?
2. Please identify 3 (or more) aspects of RE teaching which you have learned about during the course and which you think will help you on practice?
3. Do you feel more confident about teaching RE as a result of the course and if so, why?
4. If there were more time what would you like to be included in the course?

Question 1 was intended to be less direct about subject knowledge, but enabled students to comment using two reference points, if they remembered completing the first questionnaire. The question allowed for students to consider whatever elements they identified, rather than asking specifically about knowledge or teaching. Question 2 was intended as a quantitative question so that I could see which activities were having the most impact on their understanding. If students also gave reasons, these could be used as qualitative indicators. Question 3 gave students opportunity to reconsider the module in the light of their own personal concerns as expressed in the first questionnaire. I was interested to see how the issues related across both questionnaires, although being 'more confident' was not equated with entirely confident. Question 4 was included because I was interested in what priority students placed on their subject knowledge concerns. Did they require more subject knowledge, perhaps expressed in reified terms, or had their concepts of knowledge changed as a result of the module so that even though they wanted more, they also reflected a different understanding of the types of knowledge they sought?

The restructured exit questionnaire was more appropriate for the students. Instead of using terms which were more relevant to me than them and requiring a meta-reflection on their own learning, I built this more clearly into the teaching and activities themselves, so that the thinking could evolve as the module progressed. This gave me less written evidence of the impact on their thinking, but the returns the following year proved more valuable, as the comments on the module were more insightful. Data collection was stopped in 2014 so that I

could focus my reflections on the material I had collected and make adjustments to my teaching which could then be considered and refined through personal reflection as my understanding of practitioner research developed.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

Findings from the research are divided into two chapters. This chapter explores the data collected which captures student thinking during the research. Chapter 5 explores my findings about teaching RE using practitioner research to reflect on the development of the RE module.

Data are drawn from two questionnaires used during the period of the research: an entry questionnaire on teaching RE before the module began, (between 2007-2012) and an exit questionnaire reflecting on the module, (between 2010-2016). In addition, some samples of student assignments were analysed and a small sample of students interviewed to inform the research. From these are drawn examples of student voice on which I reflect, adjusting my understanding and teaching as individual issues or trends are considered.

#### **4.1 Analysis of the Entry Questionnaire**

Initially, I designed the entry questionnaire to begin the REDCo research. It was then continued for a further four years to gather six iterations of student responses (2007-2012), creating a total of 279 responses. The information gained from the students was analysed each year and re-analysed over subsequent years to identify trends which emerged across the different iterations. This created a more detailed picture of the students' views and experiences and their reporting of them.

Examples of early analysis can be seen in Whitworth, 2009, drawn from the first two iterations of the questionnaire administered during the REDCo research period:

Religious Education was seen as 'important' (17) or 'good' (11) as part of the school curriculum. Students considered that children need opportunities to learn about different religion and cultures (36). Some students saw this as leading to learning tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others (13). Some specifically mentioned that it should include all religions (6) and these should be presented impartially (3). A few students commented that religious education could teach moral values (3) and that it was important RE was included in schools because of societal change (5). Some felt it helped children of minority ethnic backgrounds to feel included (3). It is interesting to note that moral values were not indicated in most students' understanding of religious education. During the first seminar, students identified that religious education

contributed to pupils' understanding of moral values, but they considered this to be part of a wider school ethos rather than the responsibility of religious education alone.

Analysis of the second cycle (50 students) showed very similar themes. Teaching religious education was seen as important (21) or good (7). Opportunities to learn about different religions and cultures were important (20) and a number of students linked this to developing attitudes of tolerance and respect which could combat prejudice and ignorance (14). A few students also commented on how religious education could teach values (2) and that teaching about different religions and cultures could help children of diverse backgrounds feel included (2)...

These responses indicated that students were generally positive about religious education in primary schools and that they particularly valued it as an opportunity to teach children about different religions and cultures. They already linked concepts of religion and culture together and, for some, the lessons gave an opportunity to influence children's attitudes in a positive way, leading to increased tolerance and respect. Individual responses indicated how some students were already seeing religious education as an opportunity to develop dialogue in the classroom:

Religion is potentially a source of conflict in almost all walks of life, mostly caused by lack of understanding and respect. I think that religious education can address that problem and help to promote more tolerance. It is also an opportunity for children to communicate on a personal level.

(student response, questionnaire, 2006-7)

...The results of the first cycle showed clear indications of what the students expected during the course. The main expectation was that they would be taught about different world religions (49/57). They also expected to be taught how and what to teach (37). Some students hoped that they would be assisted in dealing with sensitive issues in the classroom (16) and develop their knowledge of working with children in the subject (5)...

The second cycle showed a very similar pattern. Students expected information about the different world religions (43/50), ideas on what and how to teach (35), how to approach sensitive issues (12) and how to work with children (9).

Both cycles of questionnaires indicated that approximately half of the students had concerns about teaching religious education (cohort 1: 24/57 cohort 2: 28/50). These were their own lack of knowledge, concerns about causing offence through ignorance or lack of understanding, how to answer questions which concerned their own beliefs and how to make the subject engaging for children. These findings concur with assumptions I had made before the [module] and are interesting to compare with McCreery's research with primary student teachers (McCreery, 2005). She reported that 24% of her students expressed a range of concerns about teaching religious education, including concern about subject knowledge (27%).

(extended extract from Whitworth, 2009, 122-124)

Later iterations (2009 -13) of the same questionnaire indicate that issues identified in the earlier cohorts continue to concern students in similar ratios. Reviewing the whole data collection across six years then enabled me to identify how different themes repeated or changed over the time period and compared with other research data. For example, research

from Bishop Grosseteste University College, conducted with 824 primary trainees, collected concurrently with the beginning of my research, states a similar set of figures, indicating 50% were cautious or lacking in confidence about teaching RE (APPG, 2013, 11). There is sufficient concurrence to consider this as an indication of students' concerns. Perhaps this is not surprising, because my students were recording their thoughts before the start of teaching. Many students could have experienced similar approaches to religious education in their own schooling. Ofsted reports from 2007, 2010 and 2013 commented on a lack of opportunities to study 'the social reality of religion' (Ofsted, 2007, 138), despite the rise in the number of students taking both short and long course GCSEs in Religious Studies, (Ofsted, 2013). In *Transforming Religious Education* the use of RE to support personal development and community cohesion was identified as a strength, and echoed the interpretations placed on the importance of RE which my students shared (Ofsted, 2010), but in *Religious Education: Realising the Potential*, Ofsted commented on pupils' lack of knowledge and understanding in RE (Ofsted, 2013), a common concern among my students.

Student responses assisted me in responding to both group and individual opinions. Examples of student comments show some of the individual issues raised:

Subject knowledge and social attitudes:

I think RE is important in British primary schools and that knowledge about other cultures is essential in promoting tolerance of other cultures and positive attitudes.

I think it is important to reduce racism so that children have a greater understanding and knowledge and will therefore, hopefully, respect other cultures and beliefs

Attending church and faith schools:

I went to a private primary and secondary school and was only taught Greek Orthodox religion during RE, so have very little knowledge of any other religions

I have only ever been taught about Christianity as I went to both a Catholic primary and secondary school, so my subject knowledge is limited.

I think RE should be taught in all primary schools. I went to a C. of E. primary school and we covered very little about other faiths. By the time I got to secondary school I found it a bit odd that suddenly all these other religions appeared!

School experience:

Children quite enjoy RE as it is different to literacy/numeracy subjects

We need to learn about the different religious beliefs as we will have a diverse range of children in our classes

It is seen as a chore, not a lesson which can be fun. This lack of enthusiasm is passed onto the children.

Future plans:

I want Catholicism [in the religious education course] as I intend to gain experience in an R.C. primary school.

(students' responses, Qu. 1, 2009-2012)

### **Question 1: What are your views on Religious Education being taught in British primary schools?**

This question was continued for all years as it encouraged students to give their own opinions on a curriculum matter which is publically debated in the media and upheld in the law (Moorhead, 2012; Chater and Erricker, 2013; Garner, 2015 ). The responses to this question were analysed using two graphs. The first graph records positive attitudes towards the place of RE in the curriculum and the second gives the main views the students recorded. The positive comments were recorded through tallying all comments which included the words 'good' or 'important' or words which showed similar attitudes such as 'vital', 'valuable' or 'imperative'. Although it may seem unbalanced to display only positive comments, interestingly, there were few dissenting voices about RE's inclusion in the curriculum, only two in each of the first two years and none in the four years following.

I do not believe that religion has a place in mainstream education.

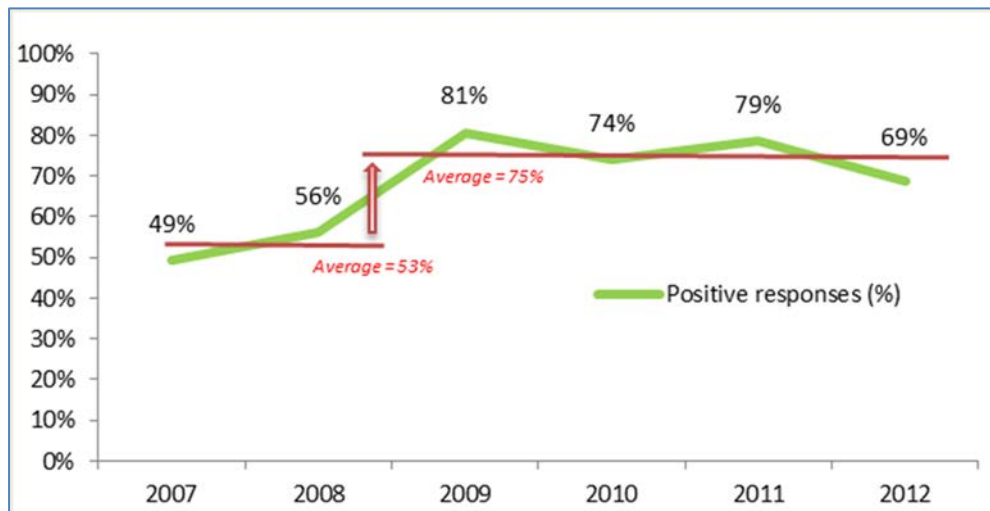
I think it should be separate, like in France.

(Students' responses: Qu.1, 2008)

This may reflect the cultural diversity or school experience of our cohorts, an increasing awareness of religious diversity and its implications in society or may coincide with a stronger identification of RE with community cohesion from 2007 onwards. (DCSF, 2007; Brine, 2008; REC, 2009; Ofsted, 2010; Grimmitt, 2010; Miller, 2011). Alternatively or additionally it could be argued that as my questionnaire was conducted in an RE session, by me, the students may feel influenced to respond positively about the subject. A similar trend emerged in the Bishop Grosseteste data, showing only 4% of students were negative about RE (APPG, 2013,11).

The tallies for positive comments continued for the six years, with students generally preferring the word 'important' to express their ideas. The two main ones, 'important' and 'good' seem semantically connected and possibly interchangeable in students' minds. As

students were not encouraged to rate specific words in their responses, the data can only consider what students chose to say about their perceptions, but the repetition of positive attitudes over six years indicated that they gave RE a positive value.



*Figure 4.1 – Positive responses to Qu. 1: What are your views on Religious Education being taught in British primary schools?*

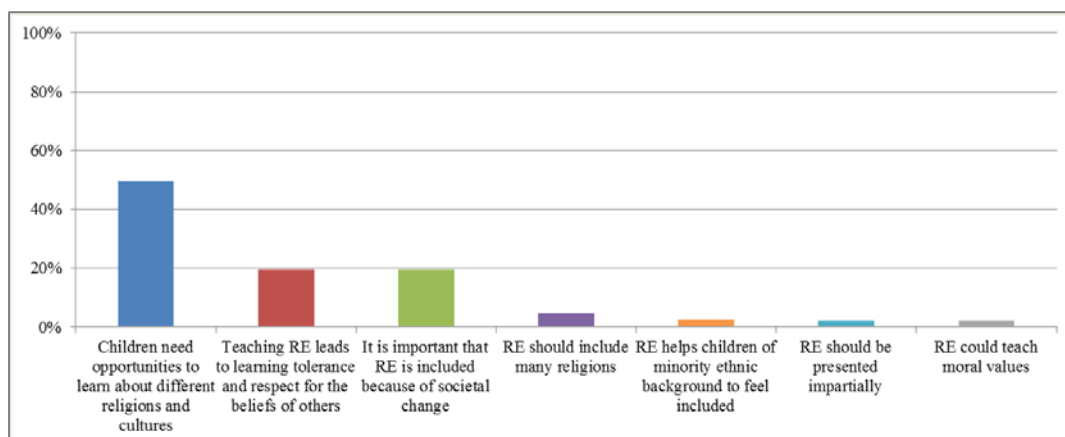
Figure 4.1 shows an increase in positive responses from an average of 53% to average 75%. The initial responses from 2007-2008 meant that in the first two years, I focused on explaining the importance of the role RE can play in the primary curriculum. The positivity expressed by students from 2009 onwards, meant I spent more time on the impact of teaching RE, rather than justifying it in the curriculum. This rise in positive attitudes may be due to the individual cohorts of students, but as the trend is maintained over four years, it is more likely to be a reflection of a change of attitude more generally in schools, rather than a change in our cohorts. Some initial negative attitudes were recorded by post-graduate students in the exit surveys, but these were made to demonstrate their change of opinion, because the content of the course changed their thinking from negative to positive.

I started the course with my doubts about the subject and religion itself. As an atheist I was surprised to discover that I really enjoyed the subject and agreed with many of its values, and even look forward to teaching it.

Before starting the first workshop I posted on Facebook saying, “Here goes two hours talking about a load of nonsense.” I was pleasantly surprised. I found workshops both interesting and very enjoyable... I thought the lessons would be about stories from various religions, but instead they were more about exploring religions.

(PGCE feedback, Exit Questionnaire, Qu. 1, 2014)

The main reasons offered from their responses can be seen in the analysis of their evaluative comments:



*Figure 4.2 – Analysis of seven themes emerging over the six years, taken as an average. Response to Qu.1: What are your views on religious education being taught in British primary schools? (Details of the year on year responses can be found in Appendix 1.1)*

There was a range of responses, but seven key themes emerged from the analysis. Figure 4.2 shows an average of 49% of students across all six years identified that children needed opportunities to learn about different religions and cultures. The students identified religions and cultures together and saw this combination as an important area of education, although not all explored why this might be.

The second theme to emerge was that of tolerance and respect. An average 20% of students indicated that they believed that learning in RE leads children to gain tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others. This was a clear trend across the first four years of the analysis, but was less prominent in the last two.

[RE is a] very important aspect of curriculum-encompasses an awful lot more than just 'religion'. It is a tool to tackle moral and social issues, within the context of certain faiths. [A] greater understanding of a variety of religions should lead to a decrease in kids' prejudices that are instilled in them from their home lives.  
(student response, Qu. 1, 2007)

Some students made a clear connection between the first and second themes, through asserting that the purpose to teach RE was to promote tolerance and respect, although this connection was not developed by all; leading to an analysis that some believed RE was important in its own right as a subject and for others its main justification lies in its potential to develop children's positive attitudes towards others. Although the graph shows only 20% of students recording that the reason to learn RE was because learning about religions led to



increased tolerance and respect; in their discussions it was clear that tolerance and respect were seen by the majority to be a principal aim for RE, although this had not been included in their questionnaire responses.

The data in Figure 4.2 indicate that 20% of students also considered that it is important that RE was included in pupils' education because of societal change. Analysis of the data across the six years (Appendix 1.1) indicates that although this is the same figure as the argument for tolerance and respect, it is by no means as consistent a response as the previous theme. In 2011, 57% of respondents included reference to societal change, causing a spike which changed the average percentage across the six years. That year students expressed a greater awareness of a changing social situation in their comments, rather than simply seeing schools as 'multicultural'. This may be because that particular group were conscious of societal changes for personal reasons or they could be reflecting contemporary discussions in the media about the multicultural nature of Britain at that time. During 2011 there had been a number of press reports detailing statistics on different ethnic groups in Britain following the *National Census* in 2010. In February 2011, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, had announced that multiculturalism was 'dead' in a speech at a security conference in Munich (Cameron, 2011). Reports of this event occurred just before the beginning of the module and were discussed in sessions. The 2011 group recorded fewer comments on the benefits of tolerance and respect and the content of RE, but directed their comments more clearly towards RE being important because of the way they perceived society to be changing.

I agree with [RE] being taught and think it is important considering how multicultural Britain has become (student response, Qu.1, 2011)

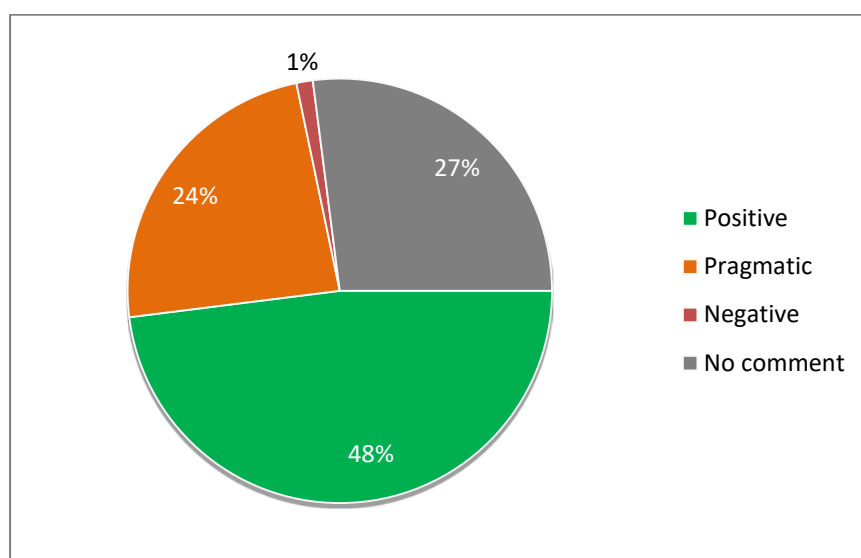
The analysis of data for Question 1 is interesting in itself, because it shows three themes of particular importance to students, but it also reveals the weakness of relying on quantitative data alone. The responses can only claim to indicate a broad collection of students' thinking at a particular moment in their development. The findings need to also be informed by observations made in the sessions, so that a more complete understanding can be achieved.

A fourth weaker theme which emerges, is that only an average of 5% of students specifically identified that RE should contain information on many religions. However, it emerged in Session 1 that the reason for this was not because they did not think many religions being taught was important, but because many of them assumed that RE automatically included teaching about many religions and therefore they did not include it in their comments. Their

views on this emerged clearly in the first session during their responses to the first activity (*The Aims Game*, see Chapter 5, Session 1). Each year each group of students discussed the aim ‘To teach children about Christianity’ (Lazenby, BBC and Culham College Institute, 1993, 8). During their discussions, some students recognised and argued the claims Christianity has to its status as a named religion in the law, but there was greater debate about Christianity’s current status in religious practice in Britain. Most students felt strongly that a wide range of religions and other worldviews should be taught in schools, including in those schools which have a faith identity. Some had even written ‘and other religions’ on the cards used for the activity because they thought other religions had been deliberately omitted.

### **Question 2: What are your views on Religious Education being part of your initial teacher education course?**

This question focuses on the students’ perceptions of their own training. I was interested to see if there was a difference between responses to Question 1 and Question 2 in students’ attitudes and expectations.



*Figure 4.3 – Students’ responses to Qu. 2 showing attitudes towards RE being part of their course. Average over six years (year on year data can be found in Appendix 1.2)*

The average of students’ positive comments was 48%, but unlike Question 1, there was no increase in positive responses during 2009-2012. In 2008, students’ recognition of the importance of RE in their course was lower (28%) than the average, perhaps reflecting some confusion about the role of RE in curriculum models. In contrast the figure increased to 61%, in 2009. That year, the *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum: Interim Report* was published, recommending six areas of learning and strengthening the profile of RE by

bringing it more closely in line with the cross-curricular recommendations of the whole report (DCSF, 2009). As the report was discussed at some length in schools and university, this recommendation might have influenced the increase in positive comments about RE in that year.

In the students' responses to Question 2, another attitude appears in the data, that of pragmatism (the RE module is 'necessary', 'useful' or 'helpful'). This may indicate that although students see RE positively in the curriculum, they may not have as much positivity about it being part of their training. There is a more utilitarian approach in an average of 24% of their responses.

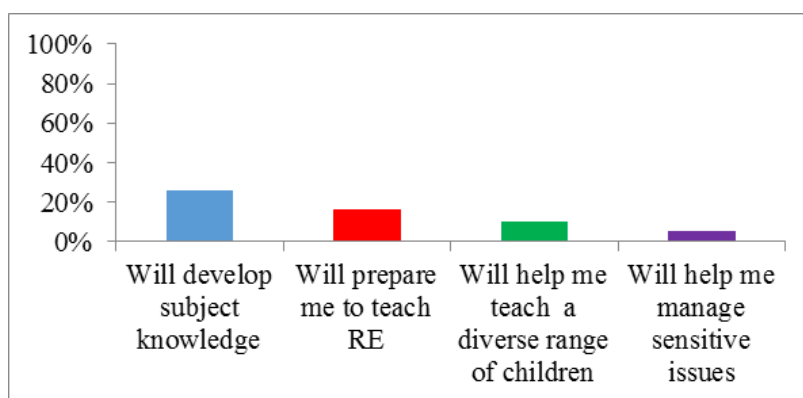
It is needed; as working in London schools you have to have a broad understanding of the children's beliefs, otherwise you will not know their needs.  
(student's response, Qu. 2, 2008)

Responses to Question 1 suggest that the subject is not seen in a utilitarian light, as useful in promoting community cohesion for example, but is seen as having its own integrity. In Question 2 though, the module is deemed 'useful, helpful or necessary' because it is contextualised in the process of becoming a teacher and, if they are expected to teach RE on placement or as NQTs, pragmatically students need to know how to teach it in order to qualify successfully.

It is necessary to know how to approach the subject... from a student/teacher perspective so that we can best inform children. (student's response, Qu. 2, 2011)

A small group of students express excitement about the RE module each year, based on the enjoyment they had experienced in learning or teaching the subject already. A contrasting group of 1% of students, who commented that they did not enjoy RE in school, were also identified and are recorded as negative on Fig 4.4. Those students registered as 'no comment' either did not complete the question or, more usually, did not make a value judgement about RE being part of their course. Instead they commented on anticipated content.

Four main expectations were expressed in the six iterations of Question 2, which are shown in the graph below:



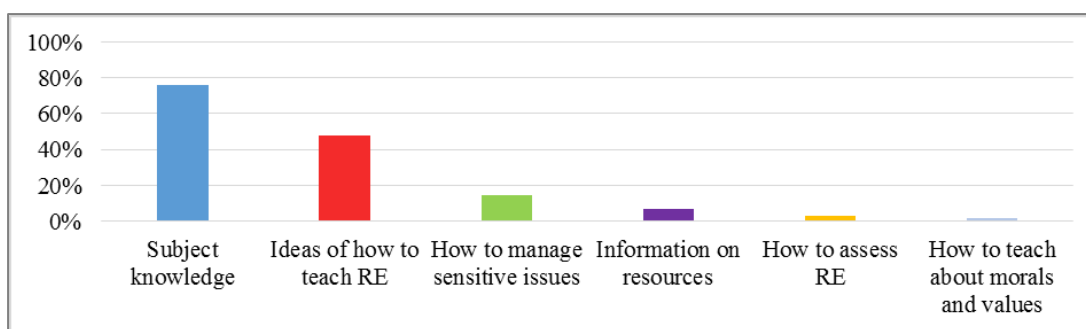
*Figure 4.4 - Four main themes identified from responses to Qu. 2, expressed as percentages across the six years*

This table indicates that subject knowledge and teaching are the main themes mentioned in the responses, although this question was not intended to be the principle question about expectations. There is no clear pattern across the responses and one should not be sought, because of the nature of the question, but it is interesting to note that there is a greater emphasis on attitudes rather than expectations in the later years of the questionnaire.

Due to the overlap with Question 3, this data was compiled separately and then compared with the data gathered for Question 3 to see if there were similar trends in expectations across the cohorts. The question was continued, because of its importance in terms of attitude, but there was some concern that students may record an expectation in one question and not repeat it in another question, so 'subject knowledge' or 'teaching' might appear only in one set of responses, but students might consider it pertinent for both. Cohort data sets were checked for repetition and, in almost every case, students repeated ideas across both questions, so the questions were tallied separately.

### **Question 3: What do you expect to be in a Religious Education initial teacher education course?**

This question is a combination of questions 3 and 4 in the original REDCo questionnaire. The questions were amalgamated in 2008 and all data collated using seven expectations listed in the first two questionnaires. Analysing in this way ensured a consistency across the data set, but I was conscious that expectations may change over the six years, so although data on these seven themes were collected, I searched for newer trends in expectations, if they appeared, or noted any which disappeared after the first two years. Teaching about moral issues and values appeared and disappeared intermittently, but there were no substantial changes.



*Figure 4.5 - Analysis of six expectations emerging over the six years, taken as an average. Response to Qu. 3: What do you expect or hope to be in a Religious Education initial teacher education course? (Year on year data is in Appendix 1.3)*

This question was included because I wanted to have student expectations recorded before the module began. I was aware of an expectation about subject knowledge from informal comments and feedback from earlier years, but now wanted to capture data so that I could gauge students' attitudes and expectations before and after the module. The first two years of REDCo information had provided me with a clear response about subject knowledge and pedagogy and their relative importance in the students' minds. An average of 76% expected subject knowledge to be in the module. Comparison with the student responses in Question 2 also indicated that subject knowledge was the main expectation of the students, followed by learning to teach the subject. I continued to monitor this question carefully after 2009, to see if there were any indications of changes or developing understanding of the complexity of subject knowledge in the student's responses. Despite their awareness of the length of the module, students persistently expected subject knowledge as their main priority, to the extreme that some students asked for a session on each religion, knowing there were six to consider and only five sessions. The consistency of this as a dominant expectation meant that we had to discuss it in the first session, so that I could explain how subject knowledge could be accessed through sessions, tasks and background reading.

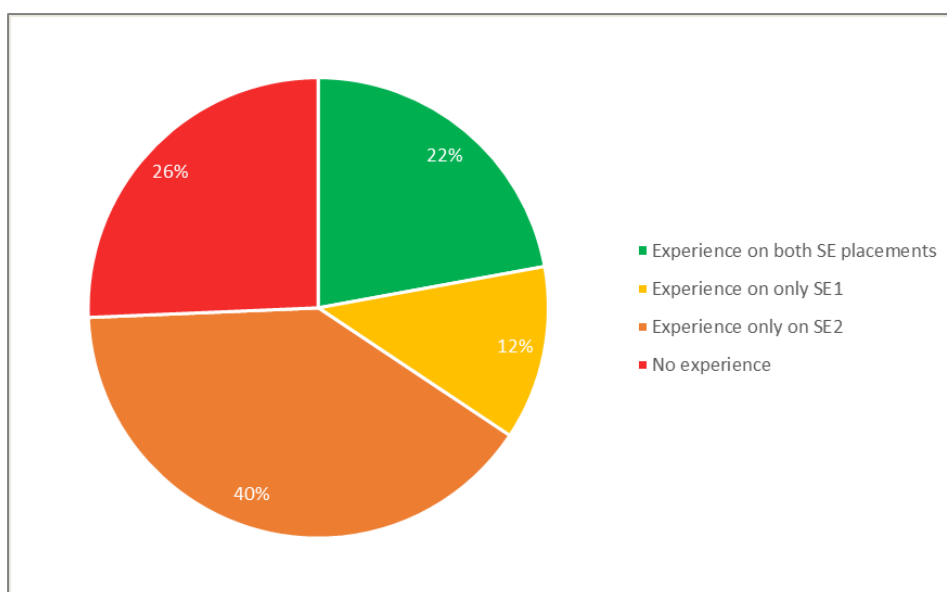
The Year 2 students have a strong sense of teaching persona by this stage of their training and are developing a professional focus on how to teach successfully (Mead, 2016). This professional attitude was generally not verbalised, but assumed in their discussions, by both them and me, and became a focus in later years when considering *phronesis*. An average of 48% expected to learn how to teach RE. The expectations expressed about teaching sensitive issues or being inclusive both emerged as issues encountered already or as areas of anxiety connected with SE. These expectations indicated the students' growing *phronesis* of how to manage teaching in relation to pupils' own knowledge and understanding. They were

recognising the complexities of teaching in the classroom, which they want to learn about, but they also had a more naïve understanding of the role of subject knowledge in their training, perhaps because this was an area in which they generally recognised they were weak. The demand for subject knowledge has been high throughout the data collection, but has tended to diminish from 89% to 65% over the six years (See Appendix 1.3). From their comments it was possible to discern a separation between the systematic knowledge or *episteme* they sought as their main requirement, and the practical wisdom or *phronesis* which they were demonstrating in the 'How to' areas identified on the graph, although this difference was not voiced by them, but emerged in the analysis.

#### **Question 4: Have you had any experience of teaching RE on SE1 or SE2?**

The questionnaire provided an opportunity to find out more about the students' experiences in school, so that I could gauge how much RE was being taught by them and advise partnership schools about including RE in students' SE. Students are unlikely to teach RE on SE1, because requirements to teach the core subjects during this KS1 placement are dominant and students are expected to teach only 40% of a teacher's timetable. Some schools provided opportunities to teach RE, but, from students' comments, these were usually church schools, as RE was more frequently included on their timetables. This data does not have relevance beyond the partnership, except in comparative terms, but informed me more specifically about my students' experiences.

During their second placement, students are expected to teach up to 70% of a teacher's timetable, ensuring that there will be more opportunities to teach foundation subjects as well as core. The second placement is in KS2 and I was interested to see how many were gaining recent experience in schools and how many were arriving at the module with no experience.



*Figure 4.6 – Student experience before the module. Average over six years*

This information enabled me to develop differentiation within the individual sessions. An average of 26% students had had no experience of teaching RE, which meant I needed to build basic understanding of RE in the classroom in each session. Students could benefit from hearing the experiences of others, but should not feel disadvantaged through not having taught the subject, especially when planning their assignment. During the module, connections were made to general teaching knowledge and understanding, as well as specific RE, because this was an important way of helping students engage *phronesis* and gain confidence. Kessels and Korthagen (2001) and Loughran, (2006), all recommended including references to a tutor's own teaching experiences and encouraging students to discuss their own, so seminars became focused on the processes of teaching, in particular pedagogical models. 'Making the tactic explicit', (Loughran, 2006, Russell and Loughran, 2007) improved the quality of discussion, moving from accounts to explanations and reflections on the causes and outcomes of individual teaching events. Over the years I built a collection of illustrative stories to develop the students' understanding of classroom techniques, developed so that those without experience did not lose confidence in their ability to teach engaging RE because of lack of opportunity thus far.

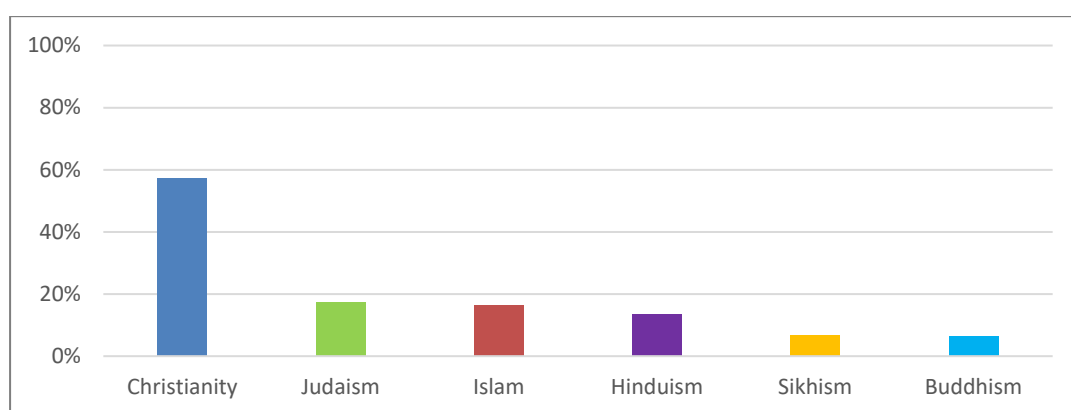
Collecting data also provided me with an opportunity to discover which religions and themes the students were teaching. The data include students who were teaching in church schools, where they were predominantly expected to teach Christianity, as well as state schools of no religious affiliation, which were using local agreed syllabuses. I was interested to discover if the schools were using topics in RE or teaching separate religions, as from 2007-2009 we had

increasing evidence from students that they were teaching topics for foundation subjects. The *Independent Primary Review* (DCSF, 2009) and the *Cambridge Primary Review* (Alexander, 2010a) both recommended themed or topic teaching in their primary curriculum reviews.

The evidence from the students was influenced by the agreed syllabuses with which they were working. Some preferred teaching discrete religions (Enfield SACRE, 2006/ 2012; Haringey Council, 2006) while others preferred themed teaching (London Borough of Barnet, 2007). Their experience was also influenced by the mode of delivery in school, as some students commented that they were not ‘allowed’ to teach RE because someone other than the class teacher taught it, often during PPA time.

**Question 5: If you have taught RE on SBT1 or SBT2, please give details of the year group and a brief description of the topic or content**

I was interested to see if the diversity of London and the multicultural intake of schools were being echoed in the religions our students were teaching in our partnership schools.



*Figure 4.7 – Students’ experiences of teaching different religions during their SE. Average of six years. (Year on year data is in Appendix 1.4)*

The data showed me the number of students teaching Christianity in Key Stages 1 and 2, which was considerably larger than expected, although may be influenced by students teaching in church schools in both Key Stages. The students were clearly getting opportunities to teach Christianity, but in the light of the Ofsted Report (2010), the quality of what they were seeing and teaching was difficult to assess. The statistics for other religions showed that more teaching involved Judaism and Islam than the other three religions, with Buddhism and Sikhism taught mainly in KS2.

The data also proved useful in helping to select which religions to use for teaching material. For example in Session 1, I chose to narrate the story of the Buddha because I could see



Buddhism was rarely taught by the students. This was important because I wanted an opportunity to teach about story in Session 1, where all students could feel included in the experience of learning together, even if they knew the story from their own schooling.

These data sets are subjective, because they are influenced by a range of local variables. The students are not always placed in the same schools year on year, as although some partnership schools take students yearly, they are not always in the same year group. Some students are keener to teach RE than others and there was anecdotal evidence from students of minority faiths being asked to teach ‘their religion’ because they would know more than the class teacher. Student teachers’ timetables were made up each year by the schools and if they had a Teaching Assistant or specific teacher who taught RE across the school, students often had their PPA time when RE was being taught (APPG, 2013). Different school experiences fell at different times of the year, so students on their KS2 placement would be in school during the Spring Term and frequently taught the Easter story, which would influence the amount of Christianity they would teach. The KS1 placement was in the Summer Term so there were fewer festivals to celebrate.

Data on teaching themes was collated to track how many students were getting experience of teaching RE thematically, particularly after the abandonment of the proposed new curriculum in 2009 (DCSF, 2009). It is clear from Table 4.8 that schools were moving away from themed teaching in RE after 2010, although Barnet continued with its Agreed Syllabus after the change in curriculum.

| Themes                | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Festivals             |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Weddings              |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Memories              |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Creation              |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Art in Religion       |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Journeys              |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Forgiveness           |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Light                 |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Water                 |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Comparative religions |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Symbols               |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Buildings             |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Celebrations          |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Holy books            |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Beliefs and customs   |      |      |      |      |      |      |

|                            |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Leaders                    |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| Prayer                     |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| Religious clothing         |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| <b>Total themes taught</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> |

Figure 4.8 – Themes taught by students with SE1 or SE2 experience. Highlighted cell indicates at least one student has taught the theme

#### Question 6: Do you have concerns about teaching RE personally?

Question 6 was included because it would be important to discover if students had concerns about teaching RE. This data would provide a more authentic basis for planning the module than any assumptions I had. I was particularly interested to see if there was a difference between those students who had taught RE and those who had not, so I reconsidered this data in relation to the responses to Question 4.

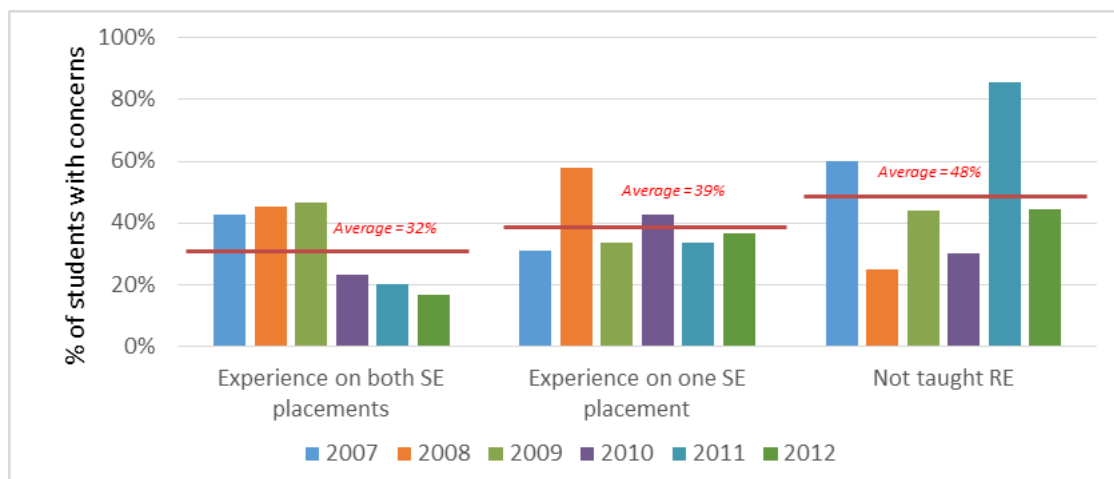
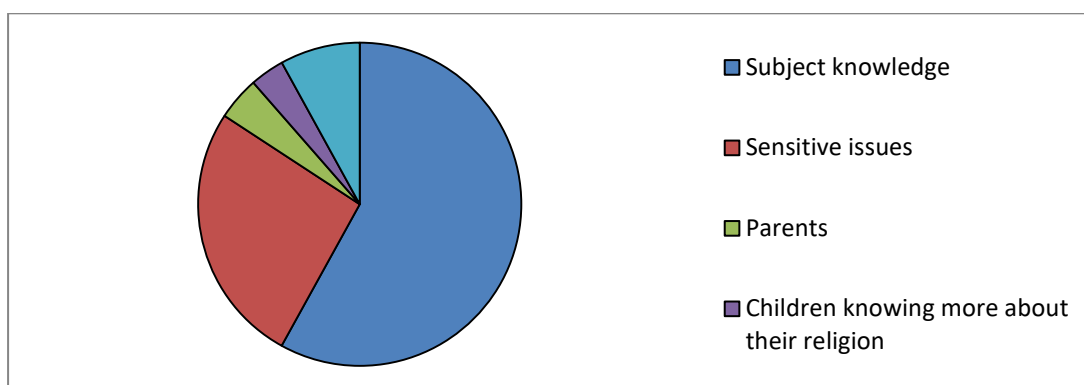


Figure 4.9 – Qu. 6: Do you have concerns about teaching RE personally? Graph shows averages across the six years, based on students' reports of their school experience.

There is some correlation between the number of students expressing concern and having teaching experience. Figure 4.9 shows that, on average, fewer students with experience of teaching RE express concerns (32% both placements, 39% one placement) versus those that have no experience (48%). In the last three years there was a small trend of fewer students expressing concerns who have had two placements, but it is slight and the results may be influenced by the specific experiences students had. A spike of 'concern' can be seen in the students who had had no experience in 2011, but the information supplied for Question 7 did not provide clear reasons for this.

### Question 7: If you do have concerns, please describe the concerns you have

This question indicated the nature of the concerns identified in Question 6.



*Figure 4.10 – Type of concerns expressed. Average over six years, all levels of experience. (Year on year analysis is in Appendix 1.5)*

The comments recorded by all students who answered Question 7 were tallied and compared to see if similar issues were recorded. Analysing the different concerns between different student experiences provided no discernible difference (*See Appendix 1.5*). A consistent group of specific concerns emerged: having enough subject knowledge, not wishing to cause offence, getting information wrong, being sensitive to different beliefs, not upsetting parents, concerns that children might know more than they did and concerns that teaching RE would place them in a compromising position in relation to their own ideas and beliefs.

#### **A reflection on the nature of subject knowledge**

Subject knowledge is consistently identified by students as a major expectation, despite the brevity of the course. This is a persistent problem, in part brought about by the limited time available for Foundation Subjects development in ITE programmes (Alexander, 2010a) and in part because students are anxious about accuracy when teaching what they perceive to be a sensitive subject.

Student concerns:

I will not be well-informed of how to approach a particular topic and ...I might misinform children with incorrect information

I would not want to offend if I used wrong terminology

[I'm not sure] how to answer unexpected questions from a child about a specific religion which I may not have knowledge of

(student feedback, initial questionnaire, 2011)

Analysing the questionnaire responses concerning subject knowledge enabled me to better understand the models of knowledge many of the students have about religions. These students see subject knowledge as information to be acquired and are expecting introductions to each world religion. In response to the question, ‘What do you expect or hope to be in a Religious Education initial teacher education course?’, one cohort of students contained these responses:

- A range of the religions and views looked at in primary schools
- Discussions on various faiths- highlighting important factors and issues
- Most important aspects of religion from the five most well-known faiths: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism
- A variation of different facts about each religion
- A lesson on each main religion that we will be teaching in primary schools

This indicates an attitude that religious education should convey information about religions, which could be connected to interpretations of AT1 Learning about Religion in a number of Agreed Syllabuses. Students are concerned to be accurate, but these comments reveal an epistemological understanding which sees knowledge of religions from hierarchical and systematic perspectives. In this case knowledge of religion implies knowledge of key outward manifestations or actions, rather than knowledge of insider positions, motivations and differences. Knowledge of this kind could be seen as principally factual, so student teachers believe they need to have command of increasing amounts of fact to be able to teach RE effectively. It also could mean that teaching RE in this way may not require teachers to interrogate religious intention or motivation, and as such RE is therefore an easier subject to teach, because this approach avoids the potential controversies of which they are nervous. When knowledge is described in this over-simplistic frame, students are aware that elements of RE are missing, but they can be strongly influenced by a quasi-scientific approach to religions which classifies and compares religious phenomena. They are influenced by an understanding of knowledge in RE being formal, analytical and independent of personal position, seeing knowledge as *episteme* (Loughran, 2006; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012). This view of religions has been consistently called into question through the work of WRERU (Jackson, 1997, 2004, 2014; Nesbitt 2004; Ipgrave *et al.*, 2009) and is now being reflected more widely in RE circles (McCreery *et al.*, 2008; APPG, 2016). A reified view of religions can also indicate lack of understanding or experience of the interrogation of knowledge in the

humanities, considering knowledge as contested and variable, rather than fixed and defined. If this is the case, then I need to consider how students could be introduced to a more mutable approach to knowledge, seeing it as influenced by beliefs, cultural and social mores, and negotiated rather than inflexible.

The original development of phenomenology in Religious Education (Schools Council 1971; Smart, 1973;) was based on the work of Ninian Smart and the Lancaster Project (Jackson, 1997). Here a phenomenological approach was described as:

[seeing] the aim of religious education as the promotion of understanding. It uses the tools of scholarship in order to enter into an empathetic experience of the faith of individuals and groups. It does not seek to promote any one religious viewpoint but it recognises that the study of religion must transcend the merely informative.

(Schools Council, 1971, 21, cited in Jackson, 1997, 8)

This kind of phenomenology was open to empathy and interpretation, yet the phenomenology suggested by the students' comments about module content is much less focused on empathetic understanding of the insider experience of a religion and more focused on content, with a risk that this could evolve into the 'merely informative'. If I am to develop the students' understanding of religions it is important to explore learning about religion with them and return to its previous meaning which encouraged interpretation.

Some students' views on knowledge in relation to religions can be seen as echoing cultural assumptions identified by Said (1995), who identified the systematisation of religions by European writers particularly in colonial times which has continued to influence Western thinking about cultures and religions (Said, 1995; Jackson, 1997). Religions were often described in contrast to Christianity, which develops a comparative mindset privileging Christianity and has resulted in materials used in school today which can assume a Christian belief and are inaccurate about other religions (Jackson, *et al.*, 2010). I need to guard against these assumptions because of my own background, (Chapter 1), so discuss with students attitudes and knowledge which I could predicate on Christianity and encourage them to interrogate their own assumptions. The reification of religion, which Jackson analyses in *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach* is indicated in the Model Syllabuses (SCAA, 1994 a and b) through a silo approach to each religion, which emphasises difference and uniqueness and has been replicated in many agreed syllabuses since. From my own experience as an RE teacher in schools using textbooks which separate and reify religions, I

agree with Jackson, that RE ‘Tends to treat ‘religions’ as discrete belief systems, and ‘cultures’ (when they are discussed at all) as separate, bounded entities’ Jackson, 1997, 47).

This has been a continuing issue in RE resources (Jackson *et al.*, 2010), yet many of my students, through their lived experiences of varied religious and multicultural identities, are daily navigating more fluid interpretations of both religion and culture (Ballard, 1994). They may, however, not perceive this knowledge to be valued in RE. If their model of religious knowledge for RE becomes more flexible and better related to the lived experience of them and their pupils, this would provide a more relevant RE in their classrooms. But to do this, their model of religious knowledge would need to be developed and their confidence in the relevance of their own experience raised through articulating the lived experience of themselves and their pupils.

In their questionnaire responses some students recognised that two forms of knowledge could be explored within the module, both religious (*episteme*) and pedagogical (*phronesis*), even though subject knowledge was privileged. They wanted:

- All religions touched upon in some detail- and how to go about teaching them appropriately
- Solid facts and information about different religions and how to effectively teach the subject

(student responses, BA initial survey year)

Some students also indicated that they saw a need for technical knowledge (*techne*), expressed in terms of being told what to do in certain situations. This indicated a lack of confidence and also a ‘beginner’ understanding of *phronesis* which required rules of operation rather than the ability to judge a situation through its context (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This understanding of knowledge was one which it is important to interrogate and develop through each session so that students became more able to rely on a more theoretical understanding based in both the *episteme* they identified as important and the *phronesis* they understood from their experiences on SE.

Some students focused more specifically on learning teaching approaches:

- Ideas how to teach religion sensitively
- Many different teaching ideas on the different topics within the subject
- A few lesson ideas on each main religion that I can use in the primary classroom

(students’ responses, BA initial survey, 2011)

These responses indicated attitudes to teaching RE which incorporated learning **how** to manage the sensitivities they perceive RE can require in the classroom and with parents.

Although a larger number of students expressing their hopes for the module in terms of religious knowledge, some were conscious of the need to recognise differing types of knowledge. This student indicates a more nuanced understanding of the complexities she faces through reflecting on her teaching experience.

[On School Experience] my subject knowledge was not sound enough. But it's not just subject knowledge, because you can learn something from a book, but actually everything that goes along with religion...all the personal stuff.'

(student reflection, 2008, cited in Whitworth, 2009, 117)

This quotation indicates this student recognises the two different types of knowledge which are valuable to her teaching, yet her problem is how to access the more informal knowledge she requires. Reflecting on this, I sought to provide opportunities and models of teaching which encouraged students to learn about lived experience from more informal sources, including themselves, to illuminate their more stereotyped knowledge, and reassure them that subject knowledge is not an insurmountable problem.

Approaches to knowledge are discussed during Session 1, so that students are aware that the research they are expected to carry out as part of the directed activities attached to each session is a major part of their subject knowledge development. Aspects of subject knowledge from each of the major six world religions are included across the module, but there is no intention to provide a systematic understanding of a religion or religions within the seminars because of time limitation. BA students are encouraged to research a religion or theme in the follow-up tasks, including origins and a brief history, beliefs and practices, holy books, worship and festivals, but to include elements of diversity within each religion.

## **4.2 Findings from student assignments**

During the REDCo research, 20% of students' assignments had been analysed to record reflections of the Interpretive Approach in their writing (Whitworth, 2009). In considering the students' use of the Interpretive Approach, the concept of 'representation' emerged most strongly from the students' work. Students echoed the language of 'some' and 'many' and emphasised that they would avoid making general statements which stereotyped religious practice.

How has the representation of Judaism been considered? It is important to ensure that stereotyping is avoided; not all followers of a religion follow exactly the same rules and rituals. One of the teaching points in the introduction [to the lesson] draws attention to the fact that not all Jewish people interpret the Torah in exactly the same way... Non-stereotypical language, such as 'some Jews believe, or 'many Jews think' will be used throughout, to reinforce the fact that there are many variances, even in the same faith. (Richard, 2006/7, quoted in Whitworth, 2009, 125)

This trend continued across all assignments and was also echoed in PGCE students' presentations. There were some students who acknowledged diversity by using their own knowledge to refer to specific groups within religions,

I feel that I have the personal knowledge and experience as a Sunni 'insider', but lack... knowledge about ...Shiites.

This student then considers she should learn more about Shi'ite traditions and concludes

This would give me more confidence in teaching this religion, knowing that I have to consider different groups/traditions within the same religion and to share them with pupils. (Aisha, 2007/8, quoted in Whitworth, 2009, 125)

What is clear in this student's thinking is her recognition of the confidence she would gain from knowing more about another group in her own religion in order that she can then share knowledge in her class. Her comment shows interesting engagement with both *episteme* and *phronesis*, in that she recognises more subject knowledge is required to increase her confidence, but embeds this in her professional understanding of good teaching. Knowledge is not required just to increase confidence, it is also needed to improve the quality of her pupils' experience.

This recognition of *phronesis* in the early research was developed through a more deliberate use of groups within traditions as a way of interrogating religious practice and belief. Using this student's comments as a stimulus enabled students to recognise the breadth of a tradition which they needed to consider. This was, for example, important when Christianity was discussed. Members of Christian Orthodox traditions spoke out about their responses to Catholic and Protestant celebrations of Christmas and Easter and their frustration with teachers who did not know about differences in dates and practice. Jewish students became more outspoken about how differences in Judaism were recognised and respected. Students became aware of the need to research more broadly about traditions and develop their subject knowledge, but also to become more attuned to the identities of pupils and how they could be supported.



One student indicated his use of insider knowledge about the Hindu Tradition through this reflection

The RE teacher needs to be mindful of how they represent religions. Religion is not something that is practiced exactly the same by everybody. ... the children can see how Hinduism can vary depending on which aspect of God you worship. They can witness how the different cultures found in Hinduism show respect: are the beads hidden or exposed? Even though the religious branches are performing almost the exact same ritual, respect shown in the rituals is very different. The children could be asked: does the Shaivite show respect any less because his beads are around his neck? And find that he still respects, just his way of showing respect is different to the Vaishnava.  
(student assignment, 2014)

He also values the knowledge he has in the context of teaching, suggesting questions which will engage children in a fascinating difference in practices. He recognises that the value of this small cameo of religious difference lies not in the knowledge that it exists, but in the enquiry he can stimulate which recognises and values difference. Asking children to consider how respect might be manifested and measured shows a confidence based on classroom understandings of what children can engage with and elevates his planning far above didactic teaching by engaging children in a value-laden question.

This student, who reveals elsewhere in her essay that she is an ‘insider’ to Christianity, planned a lesson which involved representatives from different Christian denominations and combined developing knowledge with professional understanding of what will engage pupils.

Children are combining investigative and experiential skills in both of my lessons. They are looking at the symbolism and significance of a variety of objects pertaining to Christianity and meeting knowledgeable others from the community... Through discussion and didactic teaching, from my visitors and I, the pupils will be able to explore Christianity in a wider context, something Piaget found enables children to develop intellectually (Piaget, 1977). I have used members from different denominations, to extend their view of Christianity. This and the artefacts will create a stimulus of sensory perception along with opportunities to elicit questions and to develop enquiry skills  
(student assignment, 2012)

Other students who were ‘outside’ the religious tradition they chose for their assignment, were equally able to identify the need not to over-generalise, but did not demonstrate the ‘insider’ knowledge of diversity these insiders showed, preferring to establish the principle of using ‘some’ and ‘many’ instead of ‘all’, rather than describing specific details which they could use in their teaching.

Accuracy of key facts is not negotiable in RE teaching, although some religions interpret beliefs and practices in different ways (Nesbitt: 2004). Blaylock (2004) agrees with this and...expresses that to represent a religion accurately and with consideration of diversity; you must make children aware that 'some' people do certain things within religion, or 'most' Christians go to church, for example. This I ensured to use throughout to make the children aware that not every person from a religion practices in the same way. (student assignment, 2013)

These extracts show students engaging with the element of representation in the Interpretive Approach, and beginning, in some cases, to consider reflection and interpretation. Analysis of the assignments over time indicated a range of responses to the Interpretive Approach, dependent on how important they thought it was to consider diversity and its relevance to the content of the lessons. Generally speaking, students wrote lesson plans which engaged more successfully with outward differences in religions, which children could recognise, than grapple with planning lessons which asked pupils to reflect deeply, especially on difference. The Hindu example above is unusual in its posing of a philosophical question about demonstrating respect, and is probably strongly influenced by that student's interest in philosophical debate and pupil agency. These ideas were explored in his Year 3 Inclusive Practices essay, which only became evident because I taught on that module as well.

Asking students to state the year group for which the lessons were intended focused the students on planning authentically, using their knowledge of a class or age group to assist in deciding if an activity would be appropriate or how it could be differentiated. This authentic basis for planning, using known classes, was an important part of the assignment and in building student confidence to teach RE, because it focused the students on planning RE in the same detail as other subjects. Weaker assignments tended to omit these details and were not as focused on planning for 'real' pupils, thereby losing the authenticity stronger assignments contained. Over the time of the research I strengthened the requirements for the assignment to focus on this authenticity, following conversations with students in their final placement. Students, who were able to teach RE in school and adapted their assignment plans for their new class, commented that it was easier to adjust the lessons if they could identify how the differentiation worked for their old class. This is a good example of how they brought their more general teacher knowledge into teaching RE and demonstrates both *phronesis* and *techne* in their planning. Some also began to plan differentiation and grouping considering the religious and cultural backgrounds of their classes, rather than relying on more general differentiation, usually based on Literacy.

Analysis of the assignments could provide examples of planning, but it was difficult to reach clear conclusions about the impact of the Approach on their thinking. The analysis proved ultimately to be limited by the nature of the assignment itself and the difference between the fluency students demonstrated when talking about planning and teaching and the language they used when writing. They found it more difficult to justify their planning and teaching decisions, using theory, than talking through decision-making using examples drawn from their own practice in sessions. This is echoed by a student I interviewed after her final SE. This section of transcript is her response to being asked what she remembered about the Interpretive Approach which was helpful in her teaching.

The thing that stands out most is ‘some people’ and how it really resonates with me. I’m so sick of hearing ‘Jews do this’ and ‘Jews do that’. I’m sick of it, and they still do it....And so I thought that was a really good point, and I kind of think if they [teachers] do nothing else, if they say some Sikhs do that, then... I think the job is done.... And it’s a massive improvement. (Student interview, 2012)

Representing religions in a way which begins to disrupt stereotypes was clearly very important to her. This was the aspect she remembered from the Approach and it was clearly embedded in her personal as well as her professional teaching persona. This interview took place a year after she attended the RE module so she had had time to absorb and translate the Approach into her own understanding. Just as I had needed to reconsider how to teach the Interpretive Approach at the end of the REDCo research, and decided to introduce it through the elements which most resonated with the students rather trying to transmit a complete theory as a fixed entity, so she had extracted that which impacted on her the most and absorbed it into her own practice and understanding of religious representation.

### **4.3 Findings from observations**

In Autumn 2009 I was able to visit the three students in school who had been involved in interviews for the REDCo research. These visits are discussed in Chapter 3.2 Ethical Considerations and 3.3.3 Small-Scale Research with three students. One of these visits provided a paradigm shift in my recognition of what would assist the students in improving their RE understanding. All three students shed light on the issues of teaching RE in school and the importance of knowledgeable support from their mentors.

## A paradigm shift

'Isobel' was teaching in Year 6 class in a multicultural school in North London. I visited her three times in all: once to meet with her and her class teacher in school, to obtain permission to do the research and discuss the scheme of work she was teaching from, once to watch her teach a lesson on the *Ummah* (world-wide Muslim community) and the school community, and once to participate in a lesson through team teaching.

The first lesson began with a discussion of what the word 'community' might mean, focusing on the school community as an example and then introduced the idea of the *Ummah*. Isobel carefully started from the pupils' understandings and identified with them how individuals might benefit from being in a community at school and in a larger, world-wide community. The lesson was relatively successful in terms of teaching and learning, with pupils participating and contributing, although there were some issues of disruption and Isobel later reflected that she needed to focus the class on the Learning Objectives more frequently than in earlier lessons. She was evidently confident with the class, secure with individuals and able to build on ideas about school ethos by referencing the school's own policies and practices to exemplify ideas of community. She planned her lesson to start with the children's own understandings and experiences and then developed their understanding of a religious concept. The progression of the lesson was from Attainment Target 2 Learning from Religion (in this case discussing meanings of community) to Attainment Target 1 Learning about Religion.

The second lesson on the Five Pillars of Islam was planned by Isobel, with a short teaching sequence on *salah* to be delivered by me. I wanted to see how she might develop ideas from the module and give her some experience of team teaching, without the lesson being dominated by me. As she had employed ideas discussed in the module in her first lesson, such as looking for similarities with the children's own experience, I was particularly interested in how she would develop these in the second lesson. It would also give me an opportunity to model the Interpretive Approach if I thought she needed it to be reinforced.

The lesson began with the student teaching about the *Shahadah*. It quickly became evident that although in the previous lesson Isobel had engaged the children by discussing their understandings of community first, when faced with teaching about Muslim beliefs, perhaps with the added anxiety of my presence, she reverted to didactic teaching, telling the children about Muslim beliefs rather than using the evident knowledge in the classroom which lay

with Muslim pupils. By the end of her teaching section the children were restless and some were disengaged from the lesson. Her presentation of *Shahadah* was stereotypical, although the pupils themselves were asking about differences in understanding, which she felt less confident to answer.

I began my section on *salah* by asking the children what they knew about Muslim prayer. This re-engaged the children because they could explain to me. Their description of varieties in practice was useful to illustrate diversity within the faith and enabled me to demonstrate the importance of insider/outsider dialogue to the student through my own modelling. A ten minute section enabled me to model representation of diversity in a religion using the Interpretive Approach, facilitating knowledge development through listening and responding to a variety of voices who were explaining different aspects and practices of prayer.

The student resumed after my section and completed the lesson, changing her plan as she taught to ask the children to identify two questions they wanted to ask about Islam to develop their understanding further.

In discussion, immediately after the session, a number of factors emerged which had influenced her planning and teaching. She was teaching a Year 6 class and had some anxieties about the depth of her own knowledge with the age group more generally. She had already had targets set by her class teacher to improve her management of the class. She had had very successful practices in the past and therefore was anxious that this practice would not impact badly on her final grading, although the class teacher had confidentially informed me that she was doing well. Initially she had been worried about the content of the lesson, because this was a religious tradition different from her own and she felt she had to deliver 'safe' information about Muslim practice, especially with Muslim children in the class. Delivering information which she had learnt specifically for the session seemed the safest route to promoting knowledge and she also felt influenced by my presence and a desire to be accurate in her teaching. It was very evident that lack of confidence in a variety of areas was eroding her understanding of what would work most successfully with the pupils.

Once we had identified the reasons for her factual delivery, she was able to identify better ways of engaging pupils through listening to their questions and answers. She was particularly excited by the change in the pupils' engagement while I was teaching. She identified for herself the difference in our approaches to subject knowledge and how this influenced children's participation. Recalling the concept of *representation* for herself, she

recognised the importance of engaging children with insider voices in the class who were very keen to talk about their own practices. She was then able to re-engage with her own generic teaching skills to develop a more challenging and potentially more vibrant learning environment, despite her own concerns about being able to manage the class. The impact can be seen in the student's written reflection at the end of the lesson.

**Teaching methods** – working with LW, she modelled using the interpretive approach during the 'Salah' section of the lesson. This was asking the children what they already know rather than the teacher speaking at them. This was a huge success – children had far more understanding than previously thought, acting as an assessment activity as well as an activity where children were learning from each other. It also worked well in quashing any misconceptions (e.g. K. confusing Sikhism tradition with Islam). ALL children wanted to share what they knew with the class.

**Organisation/ behaviour** - The children were far more settled than last week and were fully engaged in the lesson. The methods used in teaching obviously appealed to the class and were a great success. As the class were listening to each other rather than the teacher they wanted to listen more.

**Issues for Subsequent Planning and Teaching** - Use interpretive approach to engage and teach children

(Isobel, reflection on lesson, 17 October, 2009)

In subsequent conversations, Isobel was able to tell me how she had changed her approach to teaching RE. By the final session she was able to teach a discussion lesson focused on whether or not a mosque should be built in the local area. She was delighted with the engagement, tolerance and detailed understanding shown by the children when discussing the proposition, despite some opposition shown in the local neighbourhood to such a plan. She ascribed her progress to reconsidering her pupils' backgrounds and ensuring they had voice when discussing issues which they knew about, and reported increased confidence and enjoyment in teaching RE.

Reflecting on this event enabled me to identify some new changes in emphasis in my own teaching. Above all, teaching needed to be grounded in the students' own experiences in school to help them build their understanding of good RE teaching on their pre-existent knowledge of a range of appropriate teaching and learning strategies. I had identified *phronesis* from Kessels and Korthagen's work (2001, 20-31), but I now recognised that although it influenced me, it needed to be explained more specifically to the students as they were influenced by a very different set of pressures at the beginning of their teaching career. If I were to harness the students' experience in school to enrich their understanding of RE

pedagogy, I needed to discuss and model more explicitly and also recognise the influence of school practices as paramount with the students. Translating good practice from the university modules to the classroom could not be assumed to occur, even with an able student, especially if no connections were made between the two sites of learning. By demonstrating the validity of theoretical knowledge, in this case the Interpretive Approach, in the context of school, the student was able to reflect specifically on the approach and its pedagogy and apply it in her own understanding. The stark reality was the difference made by my involvement. Because we were able to reflect together, we both advanced our learning using the Interpretive Approach however, had I not been there it was unlikely that she would have drawn on the approach to help improve the quality of teaching in the classroom, because it was not embedded in her repertoire of teaching.

Since this event I have made more specific reference to classroom practices to assist the students in making links to what they perceive as the 'real' site of understanding teaching i.e. the school. Encouraging them to identify where elements of the approach might make a difference in school has meant they have been able to also reflect on how to change the delivery of their lesson to encourage children to engage with the material being taught.

In order to enable students to embed their understanding of school within their more general understanding of teaching the following points have been developed since 2009:

- Students are encouraged to identify all the cultural and religious influences they can in their classes. Although many parents do not wish to formally identify their religious backgrounds to a school, students are required to write a contextual analysis of their placement school reflecting on cultural, linguistic, religious and socio-economic influences. These analyses inform them about pupils' backgrounds so that all pupils are supported.
- When teaching about religious and non-religious beliefs, students are asked to identify when they are teaching material from children's own backgrounds and encourage contributions from children about their own beliefs and traditions. When possible and appropriate, pupils should be approached beforehand to ask if they wish to consider contributing in class, but no expectation should be placed on them.
- Students are asked to recognise that if children contribute there could be a range of descriptions about practice which needed to be discussed with the class so that difference is recognised and stereotyping avoided. If children only offer one model,

teachers should be prepared to identify and discuss differences, especially in practices, appropriate to the age and stage of the class.

- Students should create opportunities for children to think deeply about what they want to know about different faiths and use an enquiry approach to engage children in the learning
- Learning to reflect on religious ideas is discussed in more depth, so that students can understand that the impact of reflection can improve engagement within the lesson and lead to greater understanding of RE through that engagement.
- Different RE pedagogies are deconstructed in more detail in the module sessions so that students understand the relationship between pedagogy and learning more explicitly and the links between RE practices and more general approaches to learning are made.
- Good RE practice is linked to good inclusive practice in schools, especially through increasing students' understanding of pupils' multiple identities.
- Dialogue is encouraged as one of the ways in which pupils can engage positively with diversity. Students consider ways to make the classroom space safe for discussion through class rules on language and listening and positive models for dialogue are demonstrated and discussed.

#### **4.4 Findings from the pilot exit survey**

In 2010 I ran a pilot exit questionnaire to gauge the usefulness of students providing information at the end of the module which was related to my research. Until this time, module feedback had been collected separately as it had a specific university focus, to feed into the programme's plans for the following year. After the initial questionnaire, research had been focused on collecting individual responses, through interviews and assignment analysis. This new questionnaire was deliberately devised to give voice to a greater number of students. It was intended to counteract against bias which could emerge in the selection of assignments for individual analysis. It was not possible to interview everyone each year, but a questionnaire which was aimed at all students enabled me to read a full range of voices, compare the data each year with that group's initial questionnaire and identify emerging patterns. I considered it was particularly important, while refocusing my research approach to practitioner research, to create a difference between the two types of research and the exit



questionnaire meant I could assess my analytical honesty using a new research paradigm (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The rationale behind the pilot study was to gather and analyse data from one group in the cohort, to judge the quality of data and identify ‘outliers’ to

Test the generality of the finding [and] protect ... against self-selecting biases  
(Miles and Huberman, 1994, 269)

Questions:

1. In what ways has your knowledge of religions been developed?
2. In what ways has your understanding of how to teach religions developed?
3. How important are the attainment targets in helping to develop your RE teaching and why?
4. What types of teaching/pedagogies do you think are particularly important in Religious Education?
5. Why do you think they are important?

If the questionnaire enabled new insights, it could be incorporated into later iterations and also developed for use with PGCEs, replacing the module feedback form. Discussion of the pilot questions and how they were changed can also be found in Chapter 3.

Analysis of the pilot questionnaire revealed the questions did not yield good data. 10/20 students were unable to separate out their answers on subject knowledge and teaching religions, confusing Questions 1 and 2 together. Aspects of religious knowledge they listed included stories (6), visiting a place of worship (5), learning about festivals (3) and diverse representation of religions (8).

Question 2 included a list which was virtually repeated in answer to Question 4. In response to Question 3, all considered the Attainment Targets positively. Question 5 repeated reasons I had given them myself, so it was difficult to identify student voice separate from my own.

Analysing the questionnaire indicated that it was not recording student voice as successfully as a simpler questionnaire which asked for less categorised responses could, so the questionnaire was rewritten for the following year, and I analysed by category myself, rather than impose the categories on the students through the questions asked.

## 4.5 Analysis of the Exit Questionnaires 2011-2014

Informed by the results of the pilot questionnaire, I redesigned a more user-friendly exit questionnaire using qualitative questions, so that students could more easily record their own perceptions of the module.

1. Which elements of the RE module have been what you anticipated?
2. Please identify three (or more) aspects of RE teaching which you have learned about during the module which you think will help you on practice?
3. Do you feel more confident about teaching RE as a result of the module, and if so why?
4. If there were more time what would you like included in the module?

### Question 1: Which elements of the RE course have been what you anticipated?

This question was used to steer the students towards thinking more specifically about what they had received in the module rather than responding through a more generalised module feedback form to which they were accustomed. It made indirect reference to the entry questionnaire, Question 3 which asked: What do you expect or hope to be in a Religious Education initial teacher education course? By asking students to select ‘elements of the course’ I was requiring them to mentally construct an overview of what had occurred in order that they could select aspects which resonated with their past thinking. The question also had the potential to create recognition of differences between anticipated and unexpected elements, although I did not request recognition of this or specific examples.

|                   | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | Avg |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|-----|
| Subject knowledge | 35%  | 36%  | 36%  | 36%  | 36% |
| How to teach RE   | 38%  | 22%  | 28%  | 36%  | 31% |
| Sensitivities     | 8%   | 6%   | 2%   | 7%   | 6%  |

*Figure 4.11 – percentages of student responses to Qu. 1, grouped by main themes*

The data shows a consistent expectation of over a third expecting and receiving subject knowledge during the module, but the percentages about how to teach RE are more varied, on average scoring slightly less than subject knowledge.

### Question 2: Please identify three (or more) aspects of RE teaching which you have learned about during the course which you think will help you on practice?

This question was designed to encourage the students to identify both subject knowledge and theories about pedagogy, which had been exemplified by activities during the module, with their *phronesis* about teaching. I was interested to see which elements of the module the students validated by considering them useful in their classrooms. I anticipated that students would remember activities more easily than theories, although the details of the analysis indicate that students were also influenced by concepts. The tally system used to record the comments on the entry questionnaire was used again here.

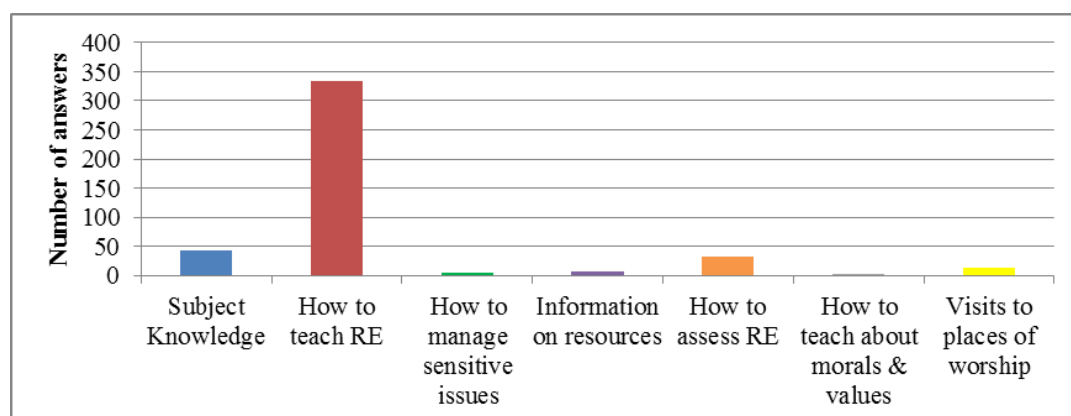


Figure 4.12 – Number of student responses on 7 key themes across 4 years. 171 students responded, 435 points raised

As could be expected, the students wrote more about teaching than subject knowledge, as that was the main focus of the module. As the students could select up to or over three aspects, the graph does not show percentages, but numbers of responses. The graph represents seven specific areas recorded as helpful for future teaching. One new area appeared after 2013, that of visits to places of worship. In the details of their responses, students recorded the impact of visiting the *mandir* during the module. It is clear that visiting the *Swaminaryan Mandir* in Neasden had a considerable impact on the students, as an educational, visual and spiritual experience.

It's a very spiritual place, and very beautiful

It's really interesting to hear someone talk about their our religion

being able to go to religious temples/ places and [know] I will be welcomed

(students' responses to Qu. 2, exit questionnaire, 2013-14)

During subsequent visits to the *mandir*, guides have told me how previous students have brought their own pupils as a result of their own experiences. This aspect of learning outside the classroom had not been indicated in student understanding before. The value of the visit lay not only in its impact on the students personally, it also widened their understanding of

primary RE to value the use of visits as part of their teaching. This created opportunities to listen to ‘insider’ voices, which students now saw as an important part of learning about religion, rather than relying more exclusively on information from books or the internet.

A range of aspects were identified in the “How to teach RE” responses, which made 77% of overall student responses. There is a clear indication from the graph the focus on pedagogy has been recognised by students and their comments indicate specific aspects of teaching in particular which had impact. Attainment targets were consistently recognised as helpful to ensure more rounded planning which includes AT2. The emphasis on AT2 occurred each year, except the year I omitted teaching ATs. Once reinstated, the students again identified AT2 strongly as an important part of their understanding of what facilitated good RE teaching. Part of this was recognition that AT2 helped students remember to engage children in developing their own understandings. It is clear from some of the students’ comments that this aspect of RE has been a revelation to them. Before the module they saw RE as acquisition of subject knowledge, but now they saw it as benefitting children’s personal understanding, rather than just focusing on knowledge.

Teaching children to express their personal interpretations of particular RE topics/stories.

Importance of AT2 to balance planning

Value of developing creativity in RE

RE doesn’t always stem from a religious point of view but can talk about a broader spirituality

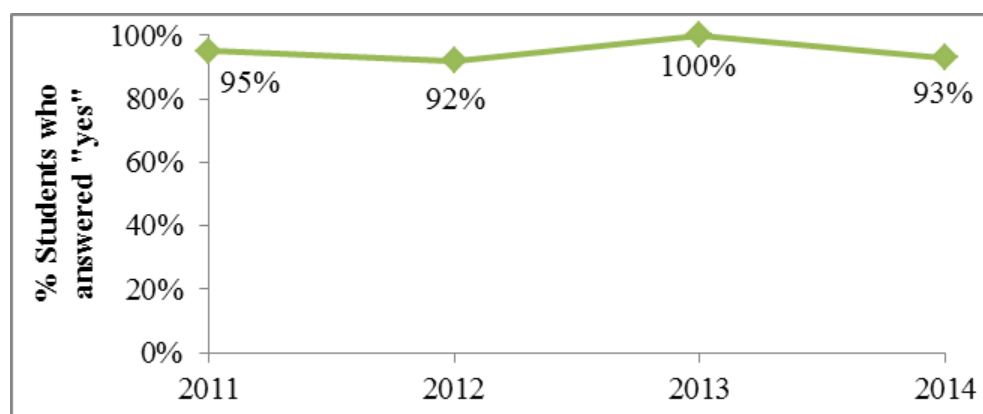
(students’ responses to Qu. 2, 2013-4)

Aspects of pedagogy they found helpful include the focus on planning and different pedagogical modules, especially investigative, dialogic and experiential. Specific activities were listed, in particular artefacts, spirituality reflections, making *diya* lamps, and discussing domestic expressions of religion. Assessment was recorded each year and some expressed more confidence about the role of assessment in RE.

### **Question 3 – Do you feel more confident about teaching RE as a result of the course, and if so why?**

This question was asked to monitor the impact of the module on students’ perceptions of confidence. In the entry questionnaire Questions 6 and 7 asked about concerns and reasons

for concerns. This question was deliberately worded so that students were not asked to express absolute confidence, as although confidence levels might have risen, they were unlikely to feel confident until they had had experience of the ideas from the module in their classrooms.



*Figure 4.13 – % of students that answered yes to question 3*

The data was analysed in two ways. Firstly it was tallied to see how many students expressed an increase in confidence as a result of the module and then reasons for confidence were grouped under four main themes which arose from the data. The high percentage of positive responses on this question indicates that the module had improved their confidence levels, although a few students also expressed concerns.

Examples of students' responses, which include echoes of some of the concerns they expressed at the start of the module, include:

Yes, I feel inspired to teach RE and for children to think RE isn't 'boring'.

Yes, as I don't feel that I need to know all the answers or have a religion in order to teach.

Much, much more confident because I have been able to discuss different teaching styles and activities which could be useful. I am not scared of teaching RE anymore.

More confident in teaching RE as we have been shown how to teach and break the subject down into a manageable structure

Yes, I feel like you don't have to be part of a religion in order to have knowledge about various religions and this shouldn't affect your teaching RE

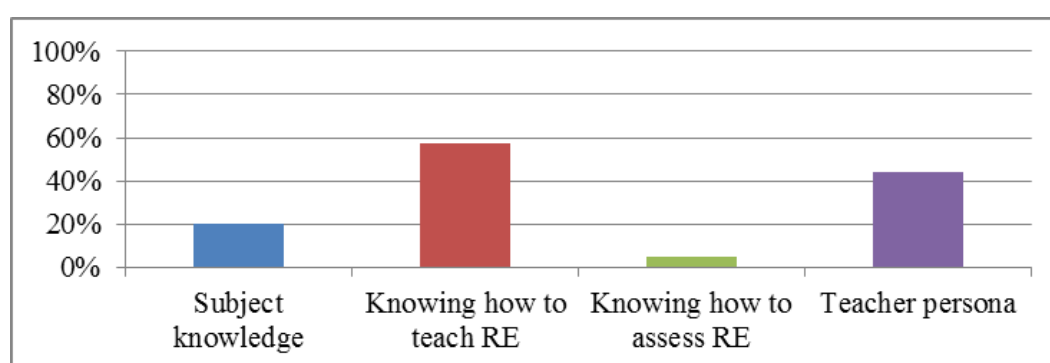
Yes, my confidence was very low as I had never taught the subject and was nervous about the potential minefield.

Yes I do not feel nervous about having big discussions when children ask those big questions. I want to be able to give children the best learning experiences

I haven't taught RE in school before, so I still feel naturally apprehensive about it, but I do feel more confident in my approach as the course has given ideas and examples of activities.

(students' responses 2012-2014)

Within the question, students were asked to identify the reason for their increased confidence. Most comments ascribe the rise in confidence to the methods of teaching discussed during the model. There was also less specific concern about subject knowledge and it was not emerging as the barrier it was before. Some students commented that there now seemed more to know, but felt more confident because they were not expected to know everything before teaching.



*Figure 4.14 – Percentage of students who identified four main reasons for increased confidence. Average over four years (Year on year analysis in Appendix 1.7)*

A new factor emerged in the analysis, that of teacher persona. This analysis grouped together comments which indicated that what students had learned on the module would influence their more general teaching, beyond specifically RE. Some of the comments reflected values and attitudes, which had been discussed during the module and which students considered would now influence their perceptions of themselves as teachers and some comments were related to more technical aspects, such as developing a repertoire of pedagogies. Examples are:

Yes, I feel more secure, with a wider understanding of activities that are inclusive for everyone.

Yes I am able to think about questioning more and how to make it [my teaching] more inclusive

I am more confident because I am more aware

Yes because I feel I can afford to be more reflective

Yes, because there has been in depth discussions on pedagogy which I can use more widely

Yes it has made me realise it is not only about giving children knowledge, it is much more holistic- about how the child relates to the knowledge and how it affects their thinking.

(students' responses to Qu. 3, 2012-14)

This aspect of teacher persona was significant each year, averaging out at over 40%, and indicated how students moved on their thinking during the course of the module from delivering RE to understanding how pedagogies developed in RE could influence their thinking and teaching beyond the subject and ultimately the type of teacher they chose to be. The content and delivery of the module had made them more conscious of the process of teaching and they were engaging in meta-reflection on teaching, which indicated that engagement in considering *phronesis* through 'making the tacit explicit' in my own teaching had influenced them professionally, beyond subject boundaries.

#### Question 4 – If there were more time what would you like included in the course?

Responses to Question 4 have been recorded in Figure 4.15 to show the direct correlation with responses from question 3 in the initial questionnaire. The percentages indicate that the topics which were expected at the beginning of the module continued to be important at the end. Despite high numbers expressing more confidence, subject knowledge continued to be the main requirement, if there were more time. This indicates that students have a clear perception that there are more aspects of knowledge to be learned about each religion, including diversity within traditions.

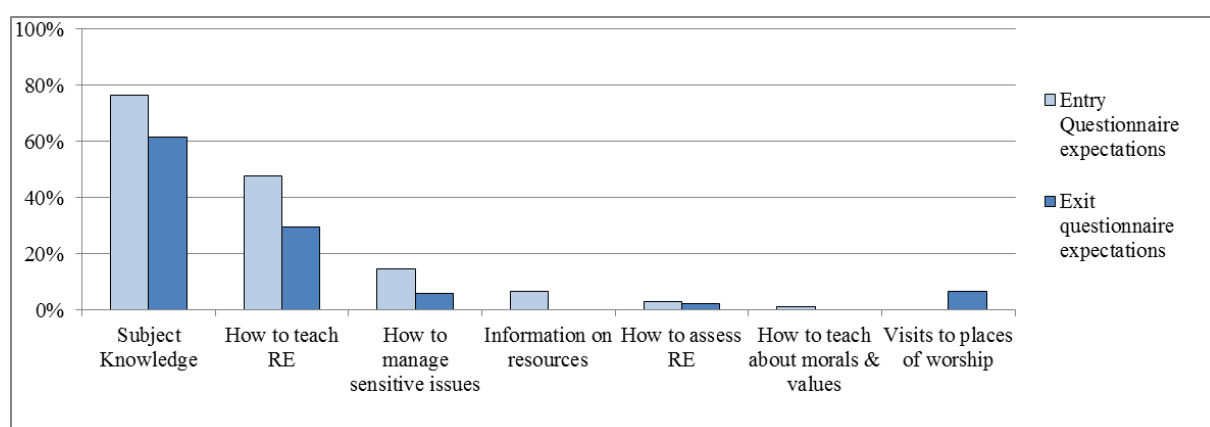


Figure 4.15 – Comparison of responses to Qu. 3 of the entry questionnaire vs Q4 of the exit questionnaire, grouped by response type (year on year responses are in Appendix 1.8)

At first sight this looks as though the students' requirements remain similar, and in many ways they are correct, they need to know more about subject knowledge and teaching. Similar issues can be tracked across both sets of responses, which is reasonable, given the brevity of the module and the limited time available to develop perceptions. I did not intend to change their understanding of the importance of subject knowledge, but what emerged in the exit questionnaire responses was a greater understanding of the layers of subject knowledge which could be revealed through seeing religions as diverse, and the relationships students were developing with subject knowledge. They were not seeing it as a barrier to teaching in the same way, but as an opportunity to engage pupils in discovering more about religions, and recognising that reified representations do not reflect the understandings and experiences children have in their own lives.

Now I can talk to children about their own lives

The course has provided information and activities so that I can explore diversity in religions

The onus is on me and I can ask children from other faiths to help. I don't have to be infallible here

I feel I know and understand different types of religions- still a lot to learn!

(students' feedback, 2012-2014)



## **Chapter 5: The RE Module**

### **Introduction**

This chapter reports and reflects on the development of the RE module and the findings I have made through different methodologies. The five sessions of the BA module, student feedback and my notes and reflections are the main sources of information. In addition, the PGCE module is compared where relevant, with the BA module, to assist in reflecting on the needs of students at different stages of their training. The relationship and evolution between the two modules is discussed. In addition, I use materials from the two modules in the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) (2006-2012) and the current School Direct (SD) (2013-16) programme, so there is reflection on the differences resulting from less time and access to these students and the impact of a school-based training route on students' use of *phronesis*.

I consider the intention, teaching and learning content of each session, student activities and the evolution of aspects of the modules as a result of analysis and reflection. The ethnographic process of 'making the familiar strange' (Spiro, 1991; Maso, 2001; Pollner and Emerson, 2001) has enabled me to consider the assumptions and knowledges which underpin my teaching and differing complexities at play. Approaches and developments in methodological understanding are indicated as different approaches were trialled to understand further the impact of the modules on student understanding and confidence.

### **5.1 Ethnographic Reflections on the students**

#### **Ethnography as a tool to assist understanding**

In his essay *Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, Clifford Geertz discusses the role of the ethnographer as one who provides a 'thick description' of the subject being observed (Geertz, 1973, 6), in order to produce a richer understanding of the circumstances and the meanings ascribed to events and social interactions by those researched (Conteh, Gregory, Kearney and Mor-Sommerfeld, 2005; Jackson, 1997). Discussion of ethnography is included in the methodology chapter. This section explores the details of the RE modules, using an ethnographic lens to illuminate some of the activities, tensions and reflexive thinking which arose within and from the university sessions.

## **Identifying and operating in the ethnographic field of research**

Layers impacting on the context of the students are detailed in Chapter 1. Each year two cohorts of students undertake their five week module on RE. The cohorts vary in terms of culture, religion, ethnic identity, gender, education, socio-economic background, geographical origins and age. One cohort is undergraduates, who experience the module following two periods of School Experience (SE), building common understandings about teaching through language, conceptual explanations, expectations and experiences. The other is a cohort of PGCE students who have not yet gone out on SE.

By the end of these modules there are shared experiences and understandings developed through teaching and learning about RE, reflection on the nature and purpose of religious and primary education and theoretical understanding developed through common experiences and assignments. By studying the details of the module as both teacher and researcher, I use ethnomethodology as a tool to better understand what takes place in the sessions and analyse my own teaching further. Research about the modules interrogates the planning, teaching and joint understandings developed with the students in the particular context we inhabit together. To make sense of the experience it is important to understand its context and confines, the shared interpretation and common cultures shared by participants and the extent to which underlying power relationships were exposed through analysis of sessions (Garfinkel, 1967; Wenger, 1998). These cohorts provide the ethnographic field for this research as they constitute particular groupings, with shared understandings, values, training and vocabulary. These processes constitute ethnography through the identification and analysis of the commonality of experience, distinctive identities of different groups, attempts to capture their individual and group voices and developing understanding of the students' position as well as my own. The processes through which I am working build up a picture of the module and its impact on both teacher and students. My embedded situation means I am both studying with the students and making a study of them, and the resultant reflexive process assists in moving our thinking on, both individually and together (Hale, Snow-Gerono and Morales, 2008).

## **Assumptions in and of the BA cohort**

At the beginning of the module the BA students and I reflect on the range of experiences they bring to the sessions. The cohort has been together for over eighteen months. Every student attends every module, attendance is compulsory and all students have been assessed against the relevant Teaching Standards (TDA, 2007; DfE, 2011b) when on SE. Two modules of

*Professional Studies and Preparation for School Experience* will have particularly focused on enculturating them into shared school and tutor expectations about primary teaching. I will have taught every student on a Year 1 Humanities module and, in the last three years already lectured on culturally responsive teaching as part of their Year 2 Professional Studies module. Students have shared common readings, lectures and seminars and have had two experiences of teaching in school, one in each Key Stage, which will have provided a dominant influence on their understanding of primary education, because of their perceptions of the authenticity of learning in school. They are building a common understanding and language of what it is to be a teacher, both theoretically and in practice. Their growing ability to operate in schools, with staff who share similar values and understandings, will have enabled them to develop and demonstrate their professional role of being a teacher and they will have been assessed on their journey through a framework used by many ITE providers. (London Providers, 2007; Sheffield Hallam University & London Providers' Harmonisation Group (LPHG), 2012). My knowledge of and involvement in their previous training both at university and in school provides a shared platform of assumptions, language, values and pedagogy from which to begin our thinking about RE.

### **Considering Groups and Individuals**

Reflection on the 'shared' nature of their training provokes a series of questions about their understandings of teaching, through recognising differing individual voices as well as assuming common group identity. As all communities are made up of individuals, it is important that although I see a commonality of shared experience and understandings in terms of teacher education, I am also aware of and differentiate for individual personal experiences and understandings in each group. I should not, in the process of reflecting about shared experiences, create a false impression of group agreement based on the dominant voices that are heard or the assumptions that I make. I need to interrogate the impact of my own teaching, recognising spaces between what it taught and what is learned. Silence does not necessarily mean consent or assent; indeed, I need to be aware of reticence as a means of preserving individuality or independent thinking, especially if students consider there is a specific intention or interpretation of education or religion which is being promoted in my teaching and which they are finding difficulty in countering. RE is my declared subject area and they see me as a knowledgeable teacher and assessor of their work, so there is a risk that students may choose to only articulate responses which they think will resonate with their perceptions of my attitudes.

The ethnographic exercise I undertake to consider the personal and professional experience of the Year 2 students (Chapter 4) enables me to recognise some of the immediate influences which are influential when they began their RE module. The dominant factor in their articulation of *phronesis* is the recall of SE, a juxtaposition of personal experience, professional identity and emotional engagement. This experience has such intensity they can recall it in detail later to illustrate their thinking, so it should be recognised as the dominant lens through which they view themselves as teachers, and needs to be acknowledged, contextualised and critically engaged with in the discussions held at university. Whatever values and beliefs are discussed in sessions, students use their own understandings of SE to filter the messages given out about the professional role of teachers. But equally I shall also filter my understanding of their experiences through my memories of SE and subsequent teaching, both in school and in Higher Education.

No matter how persuasive particular aspects of a shared social or occupational culture may be, or how well individuals are socialised into it, the attitudes and actions of each teacher are rooted in his/her own ways of perceiving the world.

(Nias, 1989, 156, quoted in Mead, 2013, 34)

### **Three key questions**

Three questions, arising from application of ethnomethodology and my own *phronesis*, act as critical interrogations during the module's delivery:

#### **1. What are the common experiences and understandings I can assume and how have they been reinforced or challenged through SE?**

Common input on their course includes personal and professional conduct, as well as more specific areas such as subject development, planning and teaching, assessment, behaviour management and inclusively supporting all pupils. Group tasks, and background reading to Professional Studies modules such as Knowles and Lander, (2011); Cremin and Arthur, (2014); Cooper, (2014); Pollard, (2014); Graduate School of Education, (2015) will have built up common understandings of expectations for teaching, including values and professional behaviours. Familiarity with these texts enables me to use vocabulary and references which have resonance with the students. In addition I am a link tutor for students on SE, which ensures we share knowledge of primary schools and the language of the Teaching Standards (currently DfE, 2011b), exemplified and modified through discussion with their mentors and class teachers. This can reinforce or challenge students' understandings, as each SE requires them to be judged against the Standards, and there are

performative expectations about their grades which need to be met. SE will have influenced students' professional and personal development as teachers considerably, through their perception of success while on practice, their assimilation of schools' approaches to pupils, their experience (or lack of it) in observing and teaching RE and, if teaching themed or topic work, RE's relationship to other subjects. The ages of the classes they have taught, the school's location and relationships with cultural and religious communities in its area will influence students' thinking. Differing experiences in mono- and multicultural classrooms also influence students' confidence in teaching about religions and experience of faith schools impacts on understandings of the purposes of RE. The information I gathered from the students in the entry questionnaire (2007 to 2012) about their experiences teaching RE ensures I am aware of the issues they wish to address, but it is also important not to disadvantage those who have not yet taught RE, either through a feeling that they have little to contribute in sessions in comparison with those with experience, or when writing assignments, which require lesson plans and rationales to explain the teaching decisions they make when planning.

## **2. In what ways does students' 'knowledge' of teaching impact on their values and assumptions, both generally and in specific relationship to RE?**

Values and appropriate behaviours are important to all teachers, as teaching is a 'moral enterprise' (Richards, 2006, 13) and there is a body of knowledge and values to which teachers are expected to subscribe and against which student teachers are judged:

Q1 Have high expectations of children and young people, including a commitment to ensuring that they can achieve their full educational potential and to establishing fair, respectful, trusting, supportive and constructive relationships with them.

(TDA, 2008, 5)

Q2 Demonstrate the positive values, attitudes and behaviour they expect from children and young people.

(TDA, 2008, 5)

TS 1 Establish a safe and stimulating environment for pupils, rooted in mutual respect. Demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils.

(DfE, 2011b, 10)

But in addition the latest standards go further in Part Two, by identifying specific behaviours and values which teachers are expected to uphold:

- treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position

- having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions
- showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others
- not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

(DfE, 2011b,14)

The current standards have raised huge questions for teacher educators, because of a political desire to impose further definitions of values on teachers. There is a real tension between conforming to government requirements in order to qualify for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and developing critical teachers who may espouse these values, but who will also interrogate them for their meaning and impact on school settings (Mead, 2013, 2016).

The National Curriculum, which has influenced the schooling of most if not all of the students, sets out the principle of good education for all

teachers should set high expectations and provide opportunities for all pupils to achieve

(DfEE/QCA 1999, 31)

Increasing politicisation of teacher education continues to create huge tensions in concepts of professionalism (Stronach, Pickard and Jones, 2010; Mead, 2013), but there is a strong thread of inclusive thinking among the students which they assume is shared by all. Many of their attitudes to teaching are formed or reinforced through their classroom experiences, and their understanding of pedagogy is related to their adoption of the belief that every child should be supported and cared for. While sharing Mead's deep frustration of a discourse of values being hijacked into a competency model to assess student teachers (Mead, 2016), I consider it important to work through the expectations of the Teacher Standards with the students to both support them in their quest for qualification and to support their development of teaching values which will support them once they have qualified. It is wrong to over-simplify and relativise the 'values' discourse, so students can complete an evidence trail to achieve QTS; as there are important shared professional values transcending the language of the Standards, which teachers and mentors in school explore with students, based on both intellectual and emotional concepts of equality and justice. These are frequently couched in practical terms and inform discussions of practical decision-making in teaching, so references to values are often contextualised and may not therefore overtly articulate the moral code which underlies them, but, nevertheless, an unstated code is shared, student teachers reference when exploring what are the 'right' decisions to make in a classroom situation. Although they may not be

secure in their understanding of RE, once a situation is discussed which requires ethical judgement, they can support each other in recognising how to proceed to ensure a good outcome for pupils. It is this wisdom which supports their discussions about 'good' RE and which they find it reassuring to fall back on to guide them in making appropriate choices for children's learning.

### **3. Where is each individual on their journey of becoming a teacher of RE and how is that informed by their own identity?**

During their preparation to become teachers, students are frequently asked to consider their own knowledge and understanding, to assist them in becoming 'reflective practitioners' (Schön, 1983, 1986; Pollard, 2014). It is important when introducing RE that each student is encouraged to consider his/her own position in terms of knowledge, attitude to and experience of religion and religions, as part of their understanding of the wider content and attitudes they will be encouraged to teach (McCreery, *et al.*, 2008). In order that all students can participate, it is important that I am reflective **while I am teaching**, in particular in response to student contributions, because how I model discussion and welcome those contributions impacts directly on the atmosphere and learning the group achieves during the module (Loughran, 2006). As students contribute to discussions, I use my own *phronesis* to weigh up their familiarity with the ideas being discussed, the self-declarations they make about their beliefs and understandings and endeavour to ensure that all students, irrespective of background, understanding and experience, are engaged in the sessions. This might include engagement, dis-engagement, hostility, neutrality or positivity towards religious or spiritual beliefs, their families' and friends' understanding and engagement with religious practice (including celebration of specific festivals, dietary requirements and attitudes towards the beliefs of others). Their views may be clear and articulate or unformed and unrehearsed in terms of discussion. Religion may be a positive or sensitive area, connected with personal, religious and cultural identities or may be an area of contention, so there is a need to provide opportunities for reflection and a professional framework for discussion. Students' understandings will be different from my own, which means diversity needs to be appreciated rather than merely recognised as I filter their comments through my own interpretive lens. I take care not to equate their knowledge with mine or assume they know or understand more than they do.

Although I am unable to track every student through these questions, they serve as reminders during each module iteration to be alert to nuances when students offer examples of their own

thinking and practice. Teacher professionalism should not be reduced to ‘binary oppositions’ (Alexander, 2010a, 450) in order to make simplified points or judgements in what is a very complex area. Students cause me to interrogate my own professional position as well as remind me of the values I use during my own teaching to inform my *phronetic* decisions. Assumptions must be challenged, for example not assuming that cultural conformities among students indicate religious practice. Not all students wearing *hijab* necessarily engage in Muslim religious practices, nor does identification with a particular denomination in Christianity indicate a broader understanding of Christian belief or practice. Increasingly students have complex experiences of religion, reflecting the increasing number of families with mixed-heritage in London (ONS, 2014). The three questions assist me in reaching judgements about how to respond and broaden discussion, to challenge stereotypes and promote recognition of diversity. The questions also prompt me to value the *phronesis* students demonstrate and recognise the differences in students who have had school experience and the need to build in more moral discussions with the PGCE cohorts who have not reached this stage of development.

### **Developing research questions**

During the development of the modules from 2009, two research questions have remained constant,

- Which elements of the module are perceived by me and the students to contribute to their understanding of teaching primary RE and their use of *phronesis*?
- Could these assist student teachers in developing confidence in teaching RE?

The first research question has broadened beyond the Interpretive Approach after the REDCo research, because I was aware that although the Approach underpins my thinking, it is not something which students embrace as an entire approach, but use to inform their own understanding of teaching. The key finding of the REDCo research had been the impact of Representation on students’ thinking. This was seen through the students’ comments in the exit questionnaire and their assignments, as the recognition of diversity in religious traditions seemed to reduce students’ anxiety about ‘getting it wrong’ and instead encourage them to develop more activities using enquiry-based and dialogic pedagogies.



The second research question became central to later developments and reflections on the module, as I had more opportunity to observe *phronesis* in other aspects of teacher education, especially in terms of inclusive practice and equity in the classroom.

## **5.2 The BA RE Module** (further details of each session are in Appendix 2)

Each module has these aims:

- To consider the role of Religious Education (RE) in school and its place in the Primary curriculum
- To inform trainees of the legal requirements concerning RE
- To explain the development and use of Agreed Syllabuses in RE
- To familiarize trainees with recent publications and consider their impact on RE in schools
- To assist trainees in developing their own knowledge of major world religions and consider their representation
- To introduce, investigate and evaluate recent pedagogies and approaches which are appropriate for different ages and understandings in this subject
- To develop knowledge and understanding of planning and assessment
- To consider ways to promote social, moral, spiritual and cultural dimensions in the curriculum
- To develop trainees' knowledge and understanding in line with Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirements for Initial Teacher Training.

(Whitworth, 2013, Religious Education, Module Aims, EDP2212)

The intention of the module is to inform the students about the place of RE in the wider curriculum and encourage them to teach RE after qualification, whatever their experiences may be when on school-based training. The limited length of the module (7.5 hours) requires a mixture of theory and practical application to encourage engagement and overcome some students' expressed reluctance to teach what they perceive as a difficult and sensitive subject (McCreery *et al.*, 2008). The module introduces the unique position of RE in the primary curriculum and traces some of the significant developments in recent RE publications including Ofsted reports in RE (2007, 2010, 2013); *The Non-Statutory Framework for Religious Education* (REC, 2013); *Does RE Work?* (Conroy, *et al.*, 2013) and *A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools*, (Clarke and Woodhead, 2015).

### **5.2.1 Session 1: Introducing Religious Education**

Intention:

- To discover through written responses to a questionnaire the understandings, concerns and experiences students have about RE in primary schools.

- To ensure students understand some of the background and current legal position relating to RE
- To critically engage with a model of teaching which operates within a knowledge paradigm (*episteme*) many of the students bring to the module

In seminar 1, students engage with aims of RE taken from *Eggshells and Thunderbolts* (Lazenby, *et al.*, 1993).

- To help children understand what it means to hold a religious view of life
- To foster a reflective approach to life in the context of understanding the experience, and belief and practices of mankind
- To promote tolerance of and sensitivity towards those with religious beliefs different from one's own
- To provide children with a faith by which to live
- To develop the ability to think about questions of belief and value
- To discover the part religion has played in the history of mankind
- To foster spiritual awareness
- To help children make decisions about which faith they will adopt – to give them a choice
- To help children learn more about their own religious tradition and heritage
- To teach children how to behave
- To explore those aspects of human experience which raise questions about the meaning of life
- To teach children about Christianity

(Lazenby, *et al.*, 1993,14)

Although it may be argued that RE has developed considerably since 1993, these aims are accessible and immediately engage students with pertinent issues around subject content, attitudes and skills which they need to consider when building an appreciation of the subject's potential in their classrooms. Collaborative small group discussions draw together theoretical ideas about the nature of the subject with their more practical wisdom to select those aims which are appropriate to their classrooms and which accord with their professional values. Their selection is then shared in a general discussion, critiquing their responses and identifying those aims which they commonly agree.

Unfailingly, every year, all groups of students have placed

- To promote tolerance of and sensitivity towards those with religious beliefs different from one's own'

as one shared aim they all agree on, indicating how the socio/cultural and historical/political paradigms about the relation of RE and society, which Gearon (2013) identifies, have become part of the dominant discourse in schools today. The place of RE in good community

relations has been at the centre of recent understandings of RE, (REC 2009; Miller, 2011, 2014a, 2014b; REC, 2014; Orchard, 2015) so although there may be debate about its role in RE, this understanding must be acknowledged. It is clear that for many students RE has been justified in this way in their own schooling and it is a prominent aspect of RE in primary school teachers' promotion of the subject. Sometimes they have an over-simplistic belief that having more knowledge automatically leads to less prejudice, as knowledge will lead to understanding of 'the other'. Yet as stated in the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*:

Although a deeper understanding of religions will not automatically lead to greater tolerance and respect, Ignorance increases the likelihood of misunderstanding, stereotyping and conflict (OSCE/ODIHR, 2007, 9)

I contribute examples from research which demonstrate how children feel when their own religious identity is perceived negatively and how this can lead to feelings of division, bullying and racism (Claire, 2001; Smith, 2005; Pearce, 2005; Elton-Chalcraft, 2009). The selection and discussion of this aim is followed by a discussion on tolerance and respect, which students tell me are essential to a cohesive society,

I think it is important that children have understanding of other cultures as it will stop racism and discrimination.

I think it is important that RE is taught as Britain is religiously diverse and children should be taught to tolerant other religions.

(students' comments, 2011)

There is an important discussion around what might be meant by 'tolerance' because critical awareness develops a shared understanding of personal and professional positions (Smyth, 2012) and enables students to begin to articulate some of the attitudes they have towards religious practice. Even if there is a reticence to talk, this discussion is part of a larger process which I ensure begins during this session. Students need to find a register in which they are comfortable to teach RE so they need to express their own ideas about religion professionally, to avoid retreating to a comfortable and unchallenging attitude to teaching religion based on simple stories from long ago or far away. They need to find voices, both in small and large groups, to speak about the complexities and controversial issues which beset religion and religions, reflecting as they speak on the impact of their words on others in the group.

Tolerance means just putting up with. We need more than that...

(student comment, 2013)

Our group wants to move ‘tolerance’ to ‘respect’ (student’s comment, 2014)

I mean, I tolerant my neighbour’s dog, but it doesn’t mean I like it.  
(student’s comment, 2013)

I don’t mean to offend anyone... but I don’t agree with some religious teachings...  
(student’s comment, 2014)

There may be two meanings- a ‘back-foot’ tolerance which means ‘we’ll just put up with’ and a ‘front-foot’ tolerance which means positively promoting engaging with others, even if you do not agree with everything.... Could we move the word to ‘respect’?  
(Whitworth, teaching notes, 2014)

Knowledge itself is not enough. We need to think about how we use knowledge to promote positive understanding in our classrooms... Your classroom is like a test tube where you can experiment to find ways to help children respect each other.  
(Whitworth, teaching notes, 2015)

There is some concern about using a term such as ‘respect’ for what might be perceived as immoral or unfair religious practices:

I am concerned that I shall be forced to teach opinions that I am morally against.  
student’s comment, 2011)

There’s things I can’t respect, such as attitudes to women and how they are treated...  
(student’s comment, 2013)

The tension is clear for these students between personal and professional values and the need to find an appropriate resolution.

This is developed into a discussion about cultural and religious practices. Students engage with this through references to their own understandings and occasionally by referring to their own experiences.

Not everyone wears *hijab*, I’m Muslim but my family... we choose...I know lots of you do... (looking round the room), but I’m still Muslim...  
(British/Turkish student, no date for anonymity)

The recent focus in the media on female genital mutilation has raised issues of children’s rights which students discuss as cultural or religious practice,

We need to tackle this issue. It’s about rights. You can’t hide behind culture or religion.  
(student’s comment, 2015)

This is an example of how a shared understanding of the context and educational intention of primary schools informs and enriches the students’ thinking. We agree it is important that we promote fairness and children’s rights in our classrooms, because these are shared rights,

enshrined in law, which they have already met in the university and in schools. I can therefore build on these understandings by modelling a respectful approach when considering religious teachings and practices which could be taught in the classroom. I specifically raise difficult issues like religious bullying to enable students to hear and practise appropriate, professional and respectful responses. The students demonstrate *phronesis* which is rooted in shared values, yet adaptable to the specific issues they raise.

- To help children understand what it means to hold a religious view of life
- To develop the ability to think about questions of belief and value
- To explore those aspects of human experience which raise questions about the meaning of life
- To foster a reflective approach to life in the context of understanding the experience, and belief and practices of mankind

Discussion of these aims is particularly helpful in forming a common approach to RE, because they are centred on human experience and religion is contextualised as part of that experience. This creates a commonality which the students can share whatever their backgrounds. Students comment that they appreciate the lack of a confessionalist approach in these aims, as they are frequently wary of any hint of religious coercion on the part of teachers.

For these reasons they reject the following three aims, recognising that these are decisions for parents to make and it is not their professional role to help children choose a religious belief. Students who attended or have had SE in a church or faith school, discuss their own experiences and attitudes, raising key issues in identifying appropriate approaches in the classroom..

- To provide children with a faith by which to live
- To help children make decisions about which faith they will adopt – to give them a choice.
- To help children learn more about their own religious tradition and heritage

Providing parameters for RE, through creating a division between home and school responsibilities, assists students in professionalising their discussions. Frequently the relationship between home and school is minimised, but in RE the two different sites need to be considered individually before connections can be made. Students are particularly concerned about causing offence to parents, who can become the third, invisible but intimidating, presence in the room, especially if students have witnessed difficulties with

parents during SE. These aims provide an opportunity to model responses to parental concerns or hostility.

- To discover the part religion has played in the history of mankind

Many students recognise the contentious role of religion in history. Post-colonial arguments are used to indicate the damage the imposition of religion has done to indigenous cultures and beliefs, while other students, in particular since 2012, have cited British Values as a reason to teach Christianity in Britain. This aim creates different discussions between BA and PGCE students, as BA students, in particular those not from BAME backgrounds, can be less aware of a critical historical narrative. BA students cite the heritage of Christianity in Britain as a reason for its inclusion in syllabuses, although they may be less aware of historical events other than the crusades or Henry VIII in terms of religious references. BAME students on both BA and PGCE courses can be more critically aware because of their own personal narratives, particularly in families who have arrived in Britain as the direct or indirect result of colonialization, migration, wars, expulsions and religious divisions. PGCE, GTP and School Direct students are more likely to cite such events when discussing this aim and some include reference to different perspectives on events as a way to navigate religious and cultural historical understandings.

- To teach children about Christianity

is discussed in every session, usually with students adding the names of other religions to the aim, because of ‘the multicultural nature of schools’ and because it ‘seems only fair’ to include major religions practised in Britain today. The cohorts themselves usually contain practitioners of, or students who have family and friends connected with, at least three and occasionally as many as six major religions, as well as, occasionally, practitioners in Parsee and Jain traditions. Cohorts also contain non-religious students, from a range of other worldviews, so all discussions reflect varied backgrounds which influence the content and tone of the discourse. Students are careful when commenting on religious belief and practice as they do not wish to offend each other, and although some groups are used to discussing religious difference, ‘Yeah, we talk about what our families do’, these tend to be students from BAME communities. For some students, the RE module is the first opportunity to discuss religious practice and belief openly with adherents from different faiths in a professional or personal context.

When the law is explained, students often comment on the relevance of Christianity to British history and culture but prefer that all religions are taught, even in church and faith schools ‘because Britain is multicultural now’. Student expectation is that schools should teach all religions and, for most, also non-religious stances (QCA, 2004; REC, 2013). In 2016, I had evidence for the first time of a student teaching Humanism as a worldview in Year 6.

SE experience in church and faith schools is frequently raised by students who have been concerned by more confessional nuances in the schools’ ethos. This can challenge their own ideas about religious nurture and they can be unsure how much might be required of them, for example leading prayers and assuming a role which actively supports religious practice which they may feel uncomfortable promoting.

What should I tell my mentor if I don’t believe/don’t want to lead prayers?

Will it affect my grading if I don’t participate? (students’ comments, 2010, 2012)

These questions indicate the vulnerability students can feel when on SE. This exercise provides them with a forum to share these anxieties and provides me with an opportunity to assist students in examining their personal and professional responses to questions about their own beliefs though suggesting a range of ‘appropriate’ professional responses and inviting them to consider what seems most suited to their and their pupils’ needs. I build into this discussion about certainties and uncertainties, encouraging students to recognise that they do not need to claim to have a consistent position about their own beliefs; it is acceptable to tell pupils that they are unsure or are considering their beliefs. This is a more accurate and honest position which indicates to pupils that not all adults have found permanent answers to profound ‘big’ questions. Discussing this and rehearsing different responses according to the age and stage of different pupils’ own beliefs and identities, legitimises students’ own questionings about belief and religion and encourages them to be honest about their own religious identity and find a professional position from which to teach about RE.

- To foster spiritual awareness

is a contested aim that leads to debate about the nature of spirituality and spiritual awareness. Discussion is postponed by me until Session 4, where the issues are discussed at greater length. Some student’s responses are related to their concerns about confessional RE, as they fear that offering pupils opportunities to be ‘spiritual’ can be akin to asking them to be religious.

- To teach children how to behave

Discussing this aim ensures students have considered the limits of RE as a subject. Earlier, I referred to James Conroy's list of expectations of RE. If not reminded of this overuse of RE for other purposes, the students can commonly fall into ascribing everything moral to RE, thereby swamping the subject's identity and purpose. Discussing behaviour education as an aim of RE enables them to differentiate between the content and the purpose of the subject and extrapolate their thinking into other areas such as community cohesion and social responsibility. Many religious teachings refer to ethical behaviour, so by considering this aim, students are able to articulate the difference between how religions teach about morality and their more general behaviour management which they see as a skill.

During Session 1, students are given a broad summary of historical developments in RE since the 1944 Education Act. This ensures they have a necessary background knowledge of the legal framework and enables them to recognise some of the developments in thinking which are influencing both the subject in schools and their approach to it. Different terms in RE, such as confessional, phenomenological and enquiry-based learning are introduced so that students are aware of some of the main strands of thought and their relationship.

From 2006 to 2013, I used the Attainment Targets- *Learning about Religion* (AT1) and *Learning from Religion* (AT2) (Grimmitt, 1987) to assist students in understanding the difference between phenomenological and later approaches such as interpretive and experiential. The ATs are used in this or similar form in most of the local Agreed Syllabuses in our partnership area which students would encounter while on SE. At that time I expected the ATs to be used in the lesson plans written for their assignments, as early evidence showed this helped to embed them in their thinking. It was rare for students to be taught about them on teaching practice, but from module feedback and student interviews it became clear that the ATs were valued by many students as a way of ensuring balance in their planning.

In 2010, I specifically problematised different aspects of the module content to better understand how the students understood my teaching. The Attainment Targets were one area which I identified where my confident use of the term masked recognition of the students' uncertainties in understanding. I realised that the term 'Attainment Targets' was being used as a short cut in planning which resulted, in particular, in AT2 being misunderstood. Ofsted had raised the issue in 2005



[Learning from Religion is] narrowly conceived only as helping pupils to identify and reflect on aspects of their lives, with lessons used narrowly as a springboard for this reflection'

Ofsted, 2005,2, cited in Teece, 2010,95)

Students were more secure about AT1, although this also could be interpreted as teaching subject knowledge, with an attendant risk that it lacked careful consideration of the quality and quantity of subject knowledge appropriate to the age and backgrounds of the children being planned for. Students' desire for religious knowledge was, at times, indiscriminate and the often unconscious influence of phenomenology, which underpins much of the students' experience of RE in their own schooling, is indicated by students' expectations of broad subject knowledge outlines about each religion as part of the course. They assume that there is a body of knowledge to be learned which they can then teach to pupils. The danger of this is planning and teaching RE through a transmission model which inhibits more nuanced interpretation of lived religion. At the end of the module one student commented

[I]feel ... more confident as I realise that you can be just as creative in RE and it's not all about delivering lots of information about different faiths.

(student's module feedback, 2016)

Lack of knowledge contributes to their insecurities about teaching RE, but this is difficult to overcome unless their fundamental idea of knowledge about religions is challenged.

In Session 1 I begin to interrogate the place of knowledge in their understanding of good RE. Firstly I assist the students in identifying what phenomenology might look like in school by recounting the story of the Buddha's enlightenment. This activity serves several purposes: it explores the role of story-telling in RE, it provides a shared experience for the group which can later be used as a point of reference, it gives experience of a particular model of teaching and it provides a specific area of knowledge in a tradition which is not usually represented in the student cohort. This ensures almost all of them are 'outsiders' to this particular story, even if some have learned the story before. This perspective is helpful because it enables me to explore the content and delivery of the teaching, using ideas drawn from Loughran (2006).

For example, I explain the immediate decisions I make while I was narrating, so that students can see me respond and adapt my teaching to their input. When a student commented on the story from her knowledge of Buddhism, which was from a Chinese tradition, I articulated my decision to relate her comment to my teaching to the whole group by explaining how I would value her contribution and align it with the topic by explaining the relationship between

Chinese Buddhism and other forms, such as Thai. By explaining the decisions as I made them, the students experienced the intention of my teaching as well as the outcome of my decisions. This led to a discussion of differing images of the Buddha, as another student, who had travelled in her gap year, contributed comments about the different positions she had seen Buddha statues portrayed in when visiting temples in Thailand. As my presentation included visuals from a Sri Lankan source I could discuss variety in representing Buddhist belief and practice and, as a teaching point, demonstrate the importance of visuals, including artefacts (Buddha statues) to the students. Telling the story enabled me to model a didactic form of teaching, which was then critiqued alongside my explanation of my decision-making as students were introduced to more pupil-centred pedagogies. Interestingly, when reflecting at the end of the module, students commented how comfortable they felt when being told a story. They enjoyed the experience of being immersed in a narrative and felt confident to repeat it because they had ‘learnt it’ from me. This enabled a conversation about choosing from a toolkit of pedagogies they had experienced on SE.

I discontinued my use of ‘Attainment Targets’ in 2014, only using the phrase to explain current Agreed Syllabuses which still used them, but it quickly became apparent from the students’ assignments that this removed an understanding and planning device which students found valuable:

I feel more confident [to teach RE] as I know ...the outcomes for the lesson should include... AT1 and AT2

(student module feedback, 2010).

Assignments, interviews and module feedback forms until 2013 indicated that students particularly appreciated what they saw as the relative simplicity of the two Attainment Targets and were able to plan lessons which enabled children not only to learn about the subject matter of RE but also engaged children in developing their own reflections. At that stage of their development as teachers, they were reassured to find that both aspects were understandable and deliverable, even if their interpretation could be over-simplistic. In 2015-16 I reintroduced the ‘Attainment Targets, using the arguments made by Teece (2010, 2015) to reconsider them not as aims but as pedagogical devices. They continue to have value as the quality of RE lessons the students planned was better with than without them.

Reflection after sessions identified that I was using terminology as shorthand, because I understood the implications behind the words, but did not always explain them to students. I therefore developed a pattern of explanation which introduced key terms and then simplified

my language to explain meaning and context. I drew students' attention to this patterning as an example of differentiated teaching in the classroom, which I then found echoed in their assignments, showing that they understand this process in relation to socio-constructive learning and were able to acknowledge the role of a 'more knowledgeable other' as a device to encourage children to make links between previous knowledge and new ideas. This link to their own *phronesis*, employed when they recognised pupils did not sufficiently understand, is a further example of using Loughran's advice on making the tactic explicit so that students understood how learning can be enabled.

This reflection also indicated that I could employ other terms unwittingly, without interrogating them, so during 2013-6 I specifically developed follow-up tasks to ensure the students were aware of the wider currency of some of the terminology. I had concerns that some students might only retain their understandings for as long as the module and assignment were current, but that lack of opportunities or school practices on their final school-SE might result in their understanding of RE as we had developed it remaining theoretical, even 'idealistic', and likely to fade over time.

### **Encouraging dialogue**

Reflection and discussion with the external examiner for my module resulted in a new task to promote students' experience of discussing religion. A discussion task was introduced between Sessions 1 and 2, to design and ask questions about religious belief and practice of someone who held a different worldview. After the first iteration in 2013 it was clear that a number of students, especially on the BA course, were avoiding the task. To ensure the skill of talking about religions was embedded, I decided to develop it into two stages, with opportunity to discuss their questions in a taught session before the questions were used in dialogue. In 2014-2015, between session 1 and session 2, students were asked to design questions. These were discussed and modified in Session 2, before being asked of another person, usually another member of the cohort, after the second session. This two-stage activity was developed more proactively in 2014-15, in response to some students' own identification of their hesitancy about talking about religion, even with members of a cohort they have worked with for almost two years. When discussed in Session 2, this reticence was found to be based on a combination of perceived ignorance of other people's beliefs and a desire not to offend, coupled with a lack of experience of talking about religion for those who had no religious affiliation. I needed to challenge this hesitancy as there was a considerable

risk that these students would not develop confidence to teach RE if they had no register through which they could talk about religious sensitivities with colleagues, parents and pupils. Properly supported, this activity now resonates across the module, recognising the need that students have to articulate religious ideas both for themselves and for their pupils. Although students still preface their remarks with concerns about saying ‘the right thing’, there is now a more confident atmosphere about discussing religious difference. Student feedback from the most recent cohort listed one of the aspects they found to be effective on the module was

‘asking questions about other people’s religions to help us to learn how to ask appropriate questions and consider sensitivity’

(student’s module feedback, 2016).

One pair of students, who shared this activity, reflected on the negotiations they undertook in order to ensure no offence caused. Both realised that they did not share the same fundamental understandings of what it was to be religious and they needed to question their assumptions about how the other might believe or behave in order to create a meaningful dialogue. Articulating these understandings in front of the rest of the seminar group created an opportunity for everyone to participate in discussion about differing understandings, particularly those which can emerge between believers and non-believers. In this instance, both individuals benefitted from recognising the other’s position, but needed to reflect more on the difference in daily living between adhering to religious codes, as opposed to living without reference to them. The ‘religious’ student found it hard to understand how a ‘non-religious’ student could identify a moral code which had more than relative meaning, while the ‘non-religious’ student struggled to understand obedience to a code which in their eyes ‘made little sense in today’s world’. They then worked together to formulate questions they could ask of each other, creating a transformative experience for themselves.

Another student, from the 2015 iteration, who was a religious observer, revealed how important an opportunity this exercise was to her, by specifically and persuasively asking for someone who was not a religious believer in the seminar group to talk to her, as she had no experience of talking about religion to people who did not belong to the same tradition as herself. This underlined the need to generate ‘official’ opportunities to talk across different beliefs and worldviews, as unless encouraged, some students were very hesitant to stray beyond the groups with whom they felt comfortable and therefore benefitted from ‘permission’, through an activity, to do so.

### 5.2.2 Session 2: Artefacts, Enquiry and Investigation

#### Intention:

- To identify and develop the knowledge paradigms students operate in when considering RE, through introduction to enquiry-based and interpretive pedagogy (*episteme and phronesis*)
- To build confidence in relating RE to the backgrounds and knowledge of children in the class, including through discussion about religious artefacts
- To engage students in understanding the role of the individual and group in religious understanding
- To begin to consider representation of religions in classrooms

The focus of Session 2 is to develop the students' understanding of RE content beyond a phenomenological approach illustrated by the recounting of the story of the Buddha in Session 1. It begins with the questions they have formulated, which registers the importance of articulating information and ideas from religions to empower students and pupils in the classroom. The questions they have prepared before this session are analysed to encourage discussions about recognising and responding to cultural and religious sensitivity and refined to be asked in the interval between Session 2 and Session 3. The impact of this activity can be seen in student reflections:

[Effective ways of teaching RE include] speaking to another individual from a different religion to gain understanding and thinking of questions to avoid giving offence.

(BA students' module feedback, 2016)

The purpose of Session 2 is to engage the students in understanding the concept of representation of religions in their teaching. A range of artefacts from different religions enables students to consider, develop and share their knowledge of religious practice in the home. The range of backgrounds in the cohort ensures that there will be multiple voices which can provide insight into religious differences as well as similarities within and between religions in terms of practice and interpretation; however there also needs to be a platform from where these voices can be heard. The dynamic for the session is small group work and at this stage the students sit with people they have worked with before. Experimentation through using different groupings has indicated that peer familiarity can encourage a freer exchange of information and views at this stage of the module, because students feel less

inhibited if they do not recognise the artefacts. Building a common experience for discussion and providing a model for teaching enables me to harness Loughran's dynamic for exploring the teaching process and develop a metanarrative of explanation (Loughran, 2006). The students act as pupils, through responding to questions which could be used with a class, and as adult participants in deconstructing a teaching process. Questioning is overtly inclusive, to model how students might engage all children in a lesson. The 'bootstrapping diagram' from *A Gift to the Child* (Grimmitt *et al.*, 1991) provides a visual focus and *aide memoire* as the students are taken through the steps from initial impact to deeper understanding of self and content.

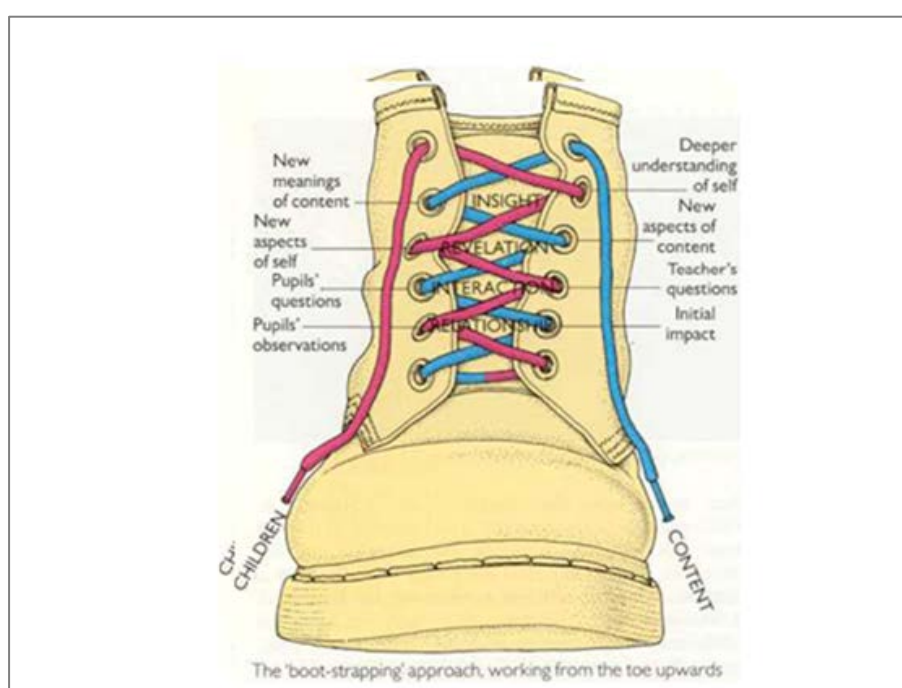


Figure 5.1 – The “Boot-strapping” approach, Grimmitt *et al.*, 1991,10

Small group work encourages experience of socio-constructive learning to embed understanding of learning theory. Some of the artefacts are chosen because they are associated with specific groups within religions, for example rosary beads, more frequently used by Roman Catholics, or a *havdalah* candle and spice box, more commonly used among orthodox than progressive Jewish families, so varieties in experience and practice can be discussed. All the artefacts used could be found in the homes of religious believers and students from religious traditions can explain their own understanding and use of items if they wish. This activity models using artefacts in the classroom with which pupils might be more familiar than the teacher. Increasingly, I encourage students to identify fellow students to explain how the artefacts are used. This builds up an awareness of the rich sources of

information their colleagues can provide and reinforces the follow-up dialogue activity for which they are preparing. Making the tacit explicit, I deliberately identify and discuss the teaching decisions I make during this section of the session. By sharing these decisions I model how they can change the dynamic in a classroom from one where teachers dominate the giving of information to one where pupils and teachers develop knowledge together, referring to my paradigm shift with ‘Isobel’. Student feedback indicates that they value artefacts for the authenticity they provide in the classroom and they feel more confident to use pupil knowledge once I have demonstrated the dynamics of the process with them.

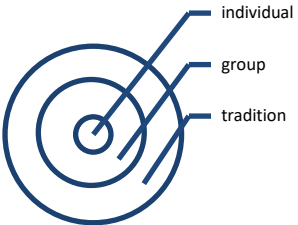
I will try to use children in my class who have first-hand experience of that religion...

Not to worry if children know more than me, but use their knowledge in the classroom

(students’ module feedback, 2016)

Diversity in religious belief and practice were identified during the artefact activities though student discussions about representation of a religion. The next stage of the session is designed to accommodate the diversities which have emerged and provide a theoretical framework to support students’ thinking and teaching. The following activity originally occurred in Session 1, but was moved to Session 2 because it contextualised diversity in belief and practice which emerged more naturally from students’ enquiries about artefacts.

### Introducing the Interpretive Approach

| Session | Activity  | Aims  | Description of activity   |
|---------|---|---|---|
| 2       | <p><b>Identifying three layers in the interpretive approach</b> – tradition, group, individual</p>  <p>(Unpublished diagram presented by Judith Everington to introduce the interpretive approach at the PCfRE*)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-To introduce a more complex appreciation of religions</li> <li>-to explore students’ understanding of knowledge in RE</li> <li>-To understand how students’ own experiences influence their ideas about religion</li> <li>-To discuss their own understandings with at least one other person to begin dialogue.</li> </ul> | <p>Students are given a concentric circle model (see diagram). They identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the religion they knew most about. (tradition)</li> <li>-if their knowledge had developed as a member of that religion or because they knew about it as a non-believer.</li> <li>-if and how that knowledge came through a particular denomination or group within the religion. (group)</li> <li>-how their own views were related to the religion and the group they had identified. (individual)</li> <li>-students discuss their diagrams in pairs and</li> </ul> |

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  | conference, Warwick 1998)<br><br>*Professional Council for Religious Education (PCfRE) |  | volunteers explained their diagrams to the group |
|--|--|--|--|

(Diagram developed from Whitworth, 2009, 118)

## Representation

Asking students to identify the religious tradition they know best provides all students with opportunities to identify knowledge independent of any religious convictions. Some identify culturally rather than religiously, others reflect on dual or multi-heritage understandings of more than one religion because of their family's composition. Talking through the concentric circle diagram demonstrates the different layers of individual, group and tradition (Jackson, 1997) while recognising that the circles are not necessarily boundaries but changes of emphasis. This enables students to construct personal diagrams to reflect on their understandings. Identification of groups within religions is exemplified through reference to different denominations in Christianity and different groups in Judaism, Islam and the Hindu Tradition. Some students found this the most complex part of the exercise, especially if they were not aware of any group influences in their upbringing.

My mum brought me up as Muslim, but I don't know which kind.

I've just learned it as Christianity, so I guess that would be Protestant, maybe Anglican, it was a church school. I don't follow it though...

I know I'm Catholic. Is that separate from Christian?

I'm Greek Orthodox. No one talks about our Christmas in school...

(students' comments during this activity, 2009-2014)

Identifying the individual in the diagram leads to discussion about those 'inside' religious belief, because they practised the tradition, and those 'outside' who do not follow it.

Identifying the lenses through which their knowledge and attitudes are formed enables students to understand the idea of representation more personally. No student is marginalised in the activity because they are asked specifically which tradition they know most about which includes both insider and outsider positions. At the end of the exercise volunteers explain their completed diagram and add biographical details.

This activity, although a very simplified introduction to the concept of representation, enabled students to consider the complexity of their own understanding of religions



and what had influenced them in terms of family, culture, education and personal development. Other teacher educators have written of the value of opportunities where students develop understanding of their own perspectives in relation to culture and religion. (Sikes and Everington 2001; Martin and Van Gunten, 2002; McCreery, 2005). By introducing the interpretive approach at this stage, I believed that students would benefit from reflecting on their own experiences and considering how this influences their approach to religious education. The experience of discussing their own views in seminars, where a variety of cultures and religions were represented, could challenge individuals to consider their own assumptions and acknowledge how preconceptions can change through dialogue.

(extract from Whitworth, 2009, 119)

Jackson's explanation of religious representation becomes personal through this exercise and challenges students' assumptions about how a religion might be taught in the classroom. This connection between personal understanding, responsibility for pupil inclusion and the risks of stereotyping religions is illuminating and transforms their understanding of how to talk about religious belief.

Over the period of the research, groups of students have become more reflective and vocal about differences in their own practice.

Students discuss their own understandings of a religion and its practices through using terms such as 'culturally a Muslim or Sikh.' They reflect on their own beliefs and how they negotiate with their families to maintain cultural and/or religious identity and continue their families' conventions about family life, while expressing a range of different personal approaches to religious belief, including disbelief

(field notes, March 2016)

By being able to recognise the way in which their own knowledge and beliefs has developed, they can discuss variation and comparison, drawing on their own experience. In 2009, I identified this early experience of diversity as a potentially significant step in developing their confidence in talking about religion, concurring with McCreery's conclusions that making trainees aware of their own perspective gives them opportunities to reflect on their own beliefs and develop their understanding of the different roles of religion in people's lives (McCreery, 2005; Whitworth, 2009). Students recognise that diversity exists in all religions enabling me to develop the concept of representation, through using different voices of the students in the session to explain variety in practice and opening a way to practise dialogue.

### **Creating safe spaces for dialogue**

Some students struggle with a public validity of the knowledge they share, which can lead them to hesitancy when explaining family practices, especially if they fear accusations of

ignorance or inappropriate practice from others of their cohort. This mirrors issues which can arise in school, which we acknowledge when discussing how to create an appropriate classroom for dialogic RE. Students build this understanding, using their previous experience of PSHE, circle time and, increasingly, Philosophy for Children (P4C) on school placement. Many will have observed how a class teacher tackled issues which arise in their class through promoting an structured opportunity for children to discuss their feelings and experiences. This dynamic is frequently built on a discourse of respect and rights, so each child feels valued and each voice is given consideration. Students reflect on ways to build classroom co-operation through discussion, drawing on their own experience to suggest appropriate activities. This activity reinforces the *phronesis* which I am promoting, by engaging students in explaining appropriate strategies, based on individual classes and circumstances, using their professional understanding of how to promote respect. A shared assumption of the value of respect and explanations of how different strategies might work in different ways encourage students to reflect on issues and describe appropriate classroom techniques and pedagogic approaches to improve a class' attitudes. Tackling controversial situations in RE, one of their deepest concerns, seems less daunting to students when they have discussed strategies with their peers and linked them to developing dialogue.

By the end of this session students will have explored inquiry pedagogy, the interpretive approach, issues of religious and cultural representation and promoting respect. All of these feed into the dialogic task which was set up in the previous session.

### **5.2.3 Session 3: Teaching about Religion through festivals**

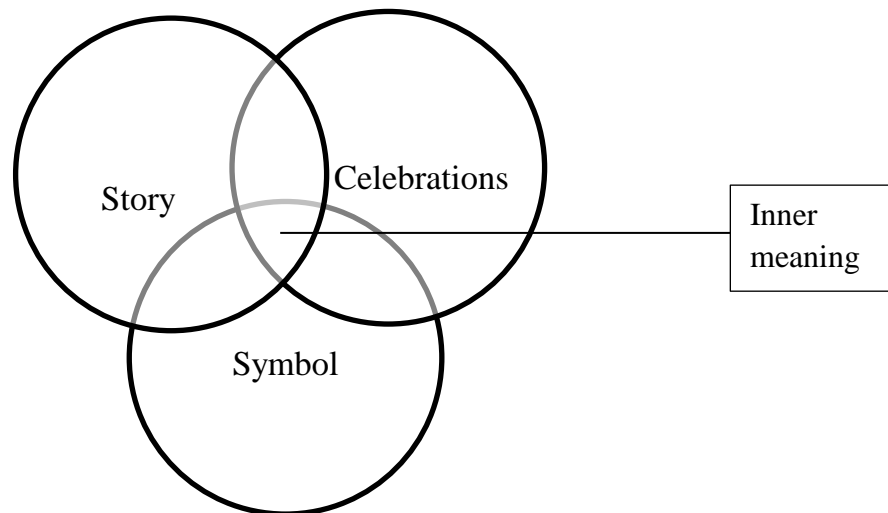
#### **Intention:**

- To develop students' understanding of teaching festivals through a variety of practical activities
- To develop understanding of the nature of knowledge which can be acquired through dialogue and relate this to the original paradigms of knowledge they identified in Session 1
- To engage with the students' practical knowledge of teaching to improve lesson planning (*phronesis* and *techne*)

Session 3 focuses on festivals, because primary schools frequently focus on celebrations to acknowledge different communities. It is designed to encourage students to think about the experiences of lived religion by asking pupils about their own experiences (NATRE/REC, 2013). There are inherent problems with over-emphasis on festivals (Troyna, 1993; Jackson,

1997; McCreery *et al.*, 2008), including tokenism in terms of understanding minority ethnic communities; but there are also inherent, important elements to recognise, because festivals are often an outward manifestation of inner belief, both for individuals and communities. One of the important realisations in teaching this session has been that students do not automatically know the intellectual background which has influenced their education. Troyna's (1993) and Madood and May's (2001) arguments about tokenism, for example, are well-rehearsed in multiracial and multi-cultural thinking, but unless students have studied them as part of their own education, they are not able to harness them to critically consider elements of multicultural education which persist today. It is good practice to acknowledge different cultures and beliefs present in the classroom, but not only because it will give recognition and voice to individuals and groups of pupils. While important, there are deeper reasons to teach children about different religions and their celebrations, bound up with social justice and agency (Madood and May, 2001; Picower, 2012). Students have a strong sense of fairness when considering how to educate children and this is invoked when considering opportunities to explore and celebrate diverse religious practices. Major festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, *Pesach*, *Diwali* and *Eid* are part of the yearly calendar in Britain. Families are granted permission to keep their children from school and individuals are allowed absence from work to celebrate key events, so understanding such occasions contributes to inter-community understanding. Recognition of festivals during the year, at the appropriate time and with accurate information, recognises the public face of faith and supports the ethos of the multicultural primary school among the diverse communities it serves, by creating opportunities for dialogue both in the classroom and with parents. This seminar encourages engagement with parents and religious leaders from local communities through discussing appropriate scenarios and expectations for their visits, reinforced by the visits the students make to places of worship during the module. The Interpretive Approach is particularly helpful here because it reminds students of diversity within religions, to avoid a visit becoming the only lens pupils have to consider an entire religion.

When planning lessons about festivals, students can become more focused on elements of celebration than religious understanding. To counteract this, the three themes outlined by Cole and Evan-Lowndes (1994) are used to consider the festivals taught in the seminar.



*Figure 5.3 - Three important elements in teaching festivals and their relationship to inner meaning, from Cole and Evans-Lowndes (1994, 81)*

Students are confident about the use of story from teaching Literacy. In addition, many of them remember religious stories from their childhoods, some of which were learned in school and others at home or during community education. Some stories carry their meaning clearly, but students and pupils need to be encouraged to explore and engage with meanings beyond the narrative, especially when metaphor and moral codes are included in the substance of the stories themselves. The risk in focusing on story is literacy-focused RE lessons. Pupils need to be encouraged to see the religious and moral elements of stories, otherwise they do not interrogate the role of the story in religious practice, but rather focus on its literary merits. Modelling story-telling for RE purposes is begun in Session 1 but considered in more depth in this seminar. The story of *Rama and Sita* is told to accompany the making of *diya* lamps, and students are asked to reflect on different ways of delivering and interpreting the story. BA students contextualise story-telling by reflecting on the classes they have recently taught, to encourage recognition of the requirements of different age groups. This embeds RE in their professional experience, again linking to the practical wisdom they have used recently on SE.

The concepts of insiders or practitioners of religious practice is particularly important in this session because students are frequently anxious about children knowing more than they do or pupils giving information which contradicts what the teacher has learned in order to teach the lesson. The example of 'Isobel' (Chapter 3) is used to encourage students to engage pupils in co-teaching about religious festivals.

Students may rely on broad summaries of religions because they were unaware of diversity within a religion or because they felt insecure about departing from their ‘book’ learning. Concern about authentic accuracy can be exacerbated in teaching about festivals if students rely too narrowly on their own experiences to form a comparative background to analyse how a festival is celebrated. Students are strongly encouraged to identify wherever possible the cultural and religious backgrounds of the children in their class as part of their recognition of diversity and children’s individual needs. They recognise the personal experience of pupils in the classroom but also need to reflect on how their own delivery can contain a range of personal experience and bias (McCreery *et al.*, 2008). The idea of religions being internally diverse and ‘fuzzy-edged’ in nature (Jackson, 2004, 87) was introduced in the previous seminar and is developed in this. Students need to recognise that their personal experiences and understandings are not universally shared and that celebrations, such as birthdays, can be varied beyond the common traditions of cards, presents, parties and cakes (Nesbitt, 2004).

Session 3 is the most replicable in terms of classroom teaching, because the activities are chosen to demonstrate and interrogate common classroom practice. It demonstrates the complexities as well as the opportunities for cross-curricular learning primary teachers negotiate daily, and resonates strongly with the students’ own experiences of managing a busy classroom. This session is central to developing confidence by demonstrating that the elements they have learned elsewhere about good teaching are equally applicable in RE. This focus on *phronesis* and confidence needs to be developed before Session 4, which challenges the students more fundamentally through experiential opportunities.

#### **5.2.4 Session 4: Understanding and developing Spirituality**

##### **Intention:**

- To develop students’ self-knowledge through discussion of different attitudes and interpretations of spirituality
- To consider the affective development of understanding and relate it to other aspects such as creativity and reflection
- To develop students’ understanding of high-quality RE through engaging with their understandings of *phronesis* and *techné* in teaching
- To encourage students to recognise the importance of dialogue in promoting children’s understanding and agency in their own education

This session focuses on spirituality and its place in RE and the whole curriculum. The positioning of the subject matter of this seminar is deliberately towards the end of the module. Despite the inclusion of SMSC in the National Curriculum, when the students

considered the aim 'To foster spiritual awareness' in the first seminar, many felt it had no place in RE and only in 2015/6, following an increased emphasis in schools from Ofsted, did any students refer to SMSC (DfE, 2014b), *The National Curriculum*, (DfE, 2014a) or Ofsted expectations (Ofsted, 2015). In Session 1 students voiced concerns about the meaning of spirituality, its religious and non-religious connotations, coercion, and expectations among some that spirituality might take a particular, defined form which is only seen as authentic in terms of religious belief or nurture. This session is designed to revisit these issues in the light of greater understanding of different RE approaches. Earlier seminars were designed to create a deeper understanding of the purposes and some pedagogies of RE, developing knowledge and confidence to deliver meaningful activities in the classroom. This seminar, creates an opportunity to assess students' development in considering the place of RE in the curriculum and consider its affective as well as intellectual potential. Although the students should not be seen as sharing the same views at any stage, they have, by this session, become more practised at discussing religious ideas and considering how to improve their RE teaching. Building on their understanding of *phronesis* is a shared focus as increasingly connections are made between what is perceived as effective pedagogical knowledge and the implications it has for RE in the classroom. Students are now introduced to experiential RE through a range of activities, including: discussion of different definitions of spirituality and spiritual education, a stilling exercise, a Nepalese Prayer Flags activity, reflection on the creativity of others and consideration of some examples from the *Spirited Arts* competition held annually by NATRE.

Through paired and group discussion, students consider a range of definitions of spirituality, from being embedded in religious experience to ideas about the possibility of a 'human spirit' (Heelas, in Woodhead and Heelas, 2000). There are tensions between transcendent and imminent interpretations, positioned by some around the concept of the Christian Holy Spirit and for others a rejection of any religious concept or language. This is an important opportunity to hear differences in understanding, to acknowledge interpretations of the term and build a vocabulary between us.

This stage of the module is always challenging because I am concerned to maintain an inclusive environment which models how students might manage tensions in their own classrooms. Until this point it is possible for students to maintain a third- person safe zone when talking about what others might do or believe. Students who wish to avoid revealing their personal position can, therefore, feel threatened when asked to consider their attitude to

spirituality. I ensure that I acknowledge a range of different attitudes in the seminar, echoing as much as possible the phrasing the students have used in our discussions. However, there are fundamental ontological differences which can make it difficult for students to share a language of 'spirituality'. To partially bridge these I use quotations from Terence Copley (1997), Jane Erricker (2001) and Rabbi Hugo Gryn (1993) to indicate a range of languages employed around these terms and refer to studies about expressions of religion and spirituality (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Woodhead and Catto, 2012). Although I am informed by the arguments surrounding the 'massive subjective turn of modern culture' (Taylor 1991, 26) in the pursuit of an individual's interests rather than social bonds, I am also not in a position to develop this thinking at length with the students because of time constraints and because there is a hinterland of understanding in this area of which they are not necessarily aware. Post-modernist thinking about the decline of the 'grand narratives' and the rise of spirituality in contrast to expressions of religious affiliation can be indicated with some PGCE groups, because there may be individuals who have studied sociology or related disciplines in their first degree, but such understandings cannot be assumed.

At this stage I certainly do not want to privilege one set of views over another and it is sometimes tempting to defuse the situation through seeking a common denominator- that of the 'human spirit'- to progress the conversation further, although this risks preferring a secularising agenda, as Gearon identifies (2013). If employed to relieve tension, sometimes this is greeted with relief as it provides a safe platform from which to discuss. Students feel it has been given by me and so is therefore acceptable and 'safe' and they are able to agree to move forward into activities. This masks, of course, the profound issues which spirituality raises in the primary school (DfEE/QCA, 1999, Wright, 2000; Ofsted, 2015), but this is an occasion where the brevity of the module prevents proper recognition of the importance of a concept in RE and I need to judge my input to challenge but not too profoundly disturb students' thinking. It is all too easy to provoke new ideas but then not discuss them together and this is a poor model of teaching as it does not recognise the position of the students but only the importance of the idea. Reflection has assisted me in understanding the difference between provocation and challenge. Challenge needs to be tailored to the students' stage in understanding and supported through references and directions to assist further thinking. Provocation on the other hand can reignite insecurity, which would be counter-productive in this context. This session challenges students because they are encouraged to consider their personal interpretations. Some students find 'religious' language intimidating and need, just

as pupils do, to link to their own understanding and experience to achieve ownership of concepts of which they are nervous. ‘Spirituality’ can be a familiar term to the religious or philosophical thinker, even though there may be a wide range of understandings of the term, including theological and humanist interpretations. Some students confuse ‘spirituality’ and ‘spiritualism’ and struggle with what they assume will be a ‘religious’ session, reawakening concerns about a confessional purpose to RE. Wright identifies this position as ‘uncomfortable’, suggesting that one response to thinking about spirituality is ‘ingrained suspicion’ (2000, 1). His identification of spirituality as a controversial issue is important, and this is acknowledged. My intentions at this stage are to recognise a broad collection of ideas, but maintain focus on understanding educational expectations about spirituality, through acknowledging differences in understanding, but not being waylaid by them. This requires a juggling act between conceptual debate and clarification of educational phrasing and this phase of the seminar is very dependent on the students’ contributions. If, as more frequently happens with the PGCE students, there are those who want to debate concepts of mind, body and spirit, Platonic dualism or explore differences between religious and spiritual belief, this needs to be engaged with, otherwise there is a danger of reducing all ideas to a common anodyne denominator and eliminating the elements of criticality which are also part of understanding spirituality (Hull, 1998; Wright, 2000; Elton-Chalcraft, 2015). I want students to recognise that there are complex understandings in this topic, and that they pragmatically need to engage with it as part of school ethos, especially in the light of Ofsted’s description of spiritual development (Ofsted, 2015, 36). Ofsted’s emphasis on enjoyment and fascination, imagination, creativity and reflection resonates with students’ understanding of whole school ethos, and the reference to beliefs ‘religious or otherwise’ and ‘respect for different people’s faith, feelings and values’, relates back to their consideration of the aims of RE, in which tolerance was universally agreed. The broadening of spirituality beyond the RE classroom into other areas of the curriculum is important, as in some schools there is still a risk that RE will be expected to provide the majority of the pupils’ input (Blaylock, Christopher and Moss, 2015). This definition avoids the more challenging and controversial elements raised by discussions about spirituality, but introduces students to educational expectations. The tension between practical teaching and existential questioning is at its most acute in this session.

In 2015 I introduced an activity using Nepalese prayer flags as part of this session to begin to explore a dimension of spirituality beyond the personal or inner and the transcendental.



Students were introduced to the purpose and design of prayer flags, including their symbolic colours, and then construct similar strings of messages they wish to send round the world. In 2016, a third of the feedback forms specifically included this activity in the question on aspects of the module which they found effective for teaching RE, a similar number to those who recorded artefacts as effective.

I understand more in depth about encouraging the sense of wonder and questioning. Asking open questions about the existence of life to children and hearing their answers... is a strategy I shall use on SE3.

(BA module feedback, 2016)

There are usually a few students who have had opportunities to observe or teach an RE lesson which uses an experiential approach. Encouraging them to talk about their classroom experiences and the type and quality of response they have seen from children validates this approach for the cohort, because it is expressed in ways which resonate with their own values and understandings about teaching. Many students are excited to explore thought-provoking ideas with their classes, and are intrigued that RE can be an opportunity to extend into cross-curricular thinking to enrich experiences. The use of creative approaches to teaching have particular resonance in this session as students begin to explore new understandings of assessment which are less product and more process-driven. I consider it important to provide experiences for the students themselves, and if the visit to a place of worship has already taken place before this session, students frequently refer to the visit as a means of stimulating children's questioning and sense of awe. They are also aware that such lessons are less 'safe' than leading the lesson through teaching, but are encouraged to identify stimuli they could use to promote reflection with children.

I also use a stilling activity based on ideas from Mary Stone, (1995). Despite familiarity with me and with fellow students, there is an ever-present anxiety from some students that they might be asked to participate in a 'religious' event, which will place them in a compromising position *vis a vis* their own faith or make them feel coerced to 'be religious', so again this is carefully presented as an educational rather than 'religious' experience.

It is clear from some students' feedback at the end of the module that this is a profound session for them, because they find an expression of themselves in the recognition of spiritual striving not necessarily related to religious affiliation. This can make their understanding of

AT2 *Learning from Religion* particularly effective and strengthen their understanding of why RE is important in their primary classroom.

This session includes an exercise to determine what makes a good RE lesson. Closer reflection on what type of knowledge could be harnessed to improve RE understanding indicated that students felt more confident if they consciously made the connections between what they knew and new ideas from RE. This was demonstrated clearly through their appreciation of an activity called ‘What makes a good RE lesson?’ in Session 5, which I introduced in 2011. The activity requires the students to identify generically what made a good lesson and then extend that to what would make a good RE lesson. The activity is intended to ensure that RE is given the same quality of planning and teaching as other subjects, but also requires students to make practical links between different knowledges they have. It should be self-evident that RE needs good teaching, but this session is specifically recognised by the students as making a positive difference to their confidence and understanding (see responses to Exit Questionnaire, Question 3, Chapter 4). Interrogating it contributed to my understanding of how we co-construct different knowledges together.

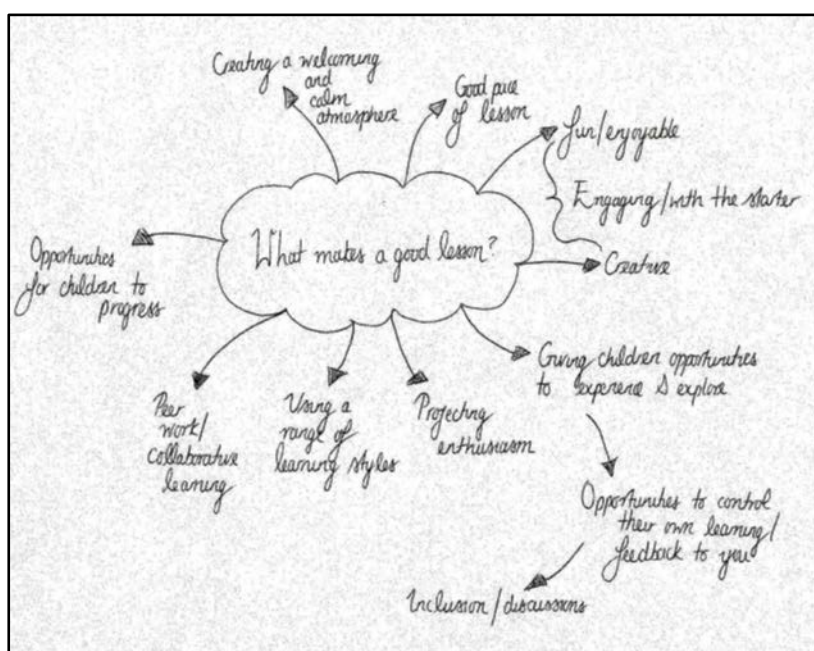


Figure 5.4 - Example of a group mindmap, What makes a good lesson? 30 March, 2011.

| <b>What makes a good lesson?</b>              | <b>What makes a good RE lesson?</b>  |
|---|--|
| Passion                                       | Interactive /Visual/ Sensory   |
| Discussion                                    | Use of story   |
| Inclusion                                     | Building on previous learning -<br>Connections to own life   |
| Engagement                                    | Open (minded)  |
| Flexibility                                   | Practical objects (artefacts)  |
| Children aware of their own progress          | Allowing children to share their own<br>experiences with the class / Opportunity<br>for insider voices |
| Opportunities to experience and explore       |  |
| Relevant                                      | Positive classroom ethos   |
| Subject knowledge explained and<br>understood | Good, secure subject knowledge   |
|   | Reflection time  |
|   | AT1/AT2  |

*Figure 5.5: Student responses to What makes a good lesson? 30 March 2011*

I facilitate by recording their ideas in the general discussion and pose questions which relate to their generic understandings to RE. Through this two-stage activity, students realised that their teaching knowledge is valuable and has real currency when used in this situation. As confidence grows, they assume my facilitating role, suggesting to each other how good teaching can be extended in RE. My reflective notes on this session indicate my surprise in their responses:

Introduced a new activity today in final session. Realised that the students were not articulating their knowledge about good teaching, even though I knew they had it from link tutoring on SE2 and comments in sessions.

2 stages- 1. What makes a good lesson? 2. What makes a good RE lesson? Thought it might be too basic, but was surprised by the result. Students showed high quality of understanding about teaching - beyond 'nuts and bolts' into pupil empowerment. Difficult to know whether this came from SE2 or the module, but there was a synergy when students combined two ideas together. Started telling me how and why their ideas would work in RE.

e.g. enthusiasm- told me that teachers had to be passionate about what they were teaching, discussed what being passionate in RE might mean- especially if not religious. Recognised that it was a passion for the subject, not passionate about being

in a religious state. Some lightbulbs going off at this point! ‘So I don’t have to pretend....’ ‘I can maintain my religious identity but be careful about talking about it’, ‘They’ll guess from the *hijab* anyway!’... ‘enthusiasm -to know for the sake of knowing, ... not to become religious’.

Some great ideas about inclusion- ‘including insiders and outsiders’, ‘differentiation could/would be different in RE- not about writing.’ ‘Could you group children according to religion?’ – that caused some discussion!

Important resonances for me:

1. socio-constructive learning- Very strong example of how the theory works. Role of MKO here- but they took it over themselves. This demonstration of their *phronesis* needs to be made explicit. Need to develop this next year so students can see theory in practice through their own experience. Different kinds of knowledge
2. Inclusion- I’m hearing the same kinds of comments I heard in Inclusive Practices earlier this year. Need to think about how to develop student understanding further here. They want to empower pupils, recognise diversity and celebrate it. Are there elements of social justice here? How could this be developed in IP next year with these students?

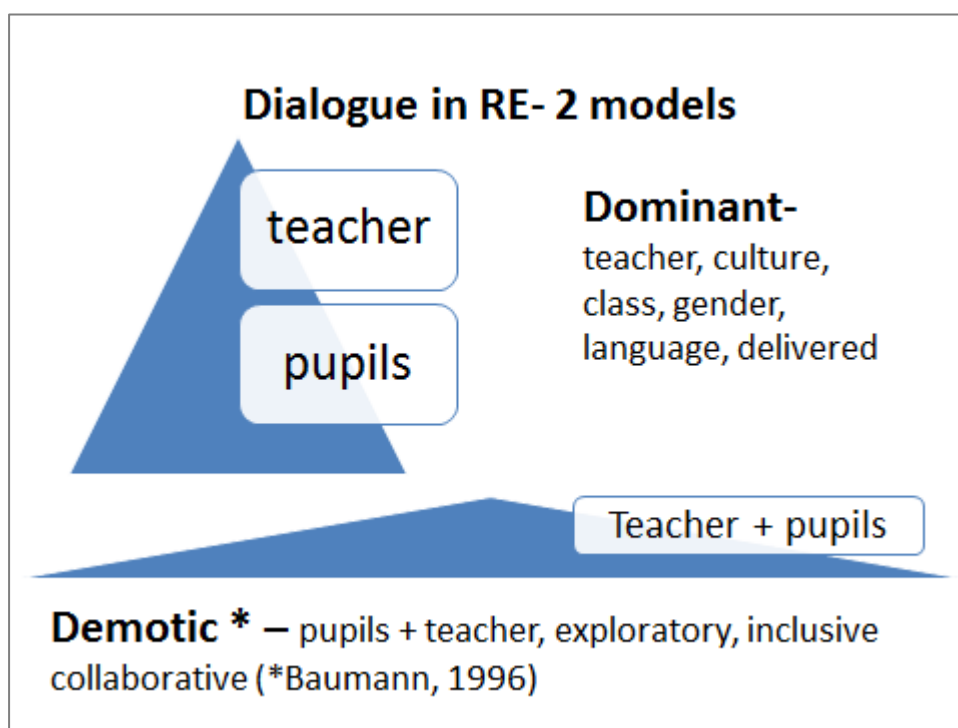
(Reflection, April, 2011)

Students’ collective and practical identification of good pedagogy develops their confidence in identifying good RE considerably during the seminar and reminds me of the importance of reflecting from the students’ point of view, and recognising their needs, not just from my own, thus creating knowledge between us about what would strengthen their understanding of good RE teaching.

*Phronesis* is an important component for confidence here, because it connects knowledge and understanding together with students’ own agency. They know they can plan lessons, but they need extra encouragement to make the connection in an RE context. This activity proved so successful as a way of explaining what RE lessons should include that it has been continued in all modules.

One of the pedagogical discussions which occur in Session 4 focuses on dialogue. The figure below indicates two different relationships between teachers and pupils in the classroom which influence the nature and quality of dialogue in class. It is used to promote students’ understanding of agency in RE. Creating opportunities for quality dialogue (Ipgrave, 2001, 2005; Jackson, 2004, 2014; Jackson and McKenna, 2005) are central to promoting

intercultural and religious understanding and are an integral part of the Interpretive Approach.



*Figure 5.6 Dialogue in RE, Session 4 Religious Education module, EDP2212 (Whitworth, 2012)*

The discussion promoted by this diagram focuses on the value of different voices representing diversity in the classroom. The concept of representation has been central throughout the module, but this session cements concepts of representation, dialogue and *phronesis* together for the students and validates their growing understandings of pupil agency. The flatter triangle represents the teacher and students learning together, changing the dynamics in a classroom to shared instruction, and away from teacher delivery. Freire sums this up in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, using ‘students’ as a term to denote the receiver of the act of teaching

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: the teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn, while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire, 1996, 61)

This session holds considerable emotional as well as professional importance for me as I reflect on my own values as a teacher. I consider there are two potential shifts in students’ understanding what can be achieved in RE: through countering a National Curriculum

narrative of performance-driven subject acquisition and through an opportunity for students to attempt different pedagogic models which can also have relevance beyond RE

### **5.2.5 Session 5: Assessment and opportunities for inclusion**

#### **Intention:**

- To develop students' understanding of assessment in RE, beyond the factual.
- to draw together students' different understandings of knowledge to assist in effective lesson planning
- to inform students of ways to develop the quality of their RE once qualified

#### **Teaching and learning in the RE session**

As a result of this research, the final seminar has evolved from focusing on aspects of reflection and exploring issues of sensitivity (Whitworth, 2009). These elements have been built into earlier sessions and the content now focuses more specifically on assessment of RE learning, as students are anxious to understand and respond to the demands of schools to provide evidence of progress. Until 2015, the level descriptors (QCA, 2004) proved very helpful in assisting students in understanding two different areas of assessment related through the Attainment Targets. Individual pieces of pupil work could be critiqued against the level descriptors and the levels themselves proved helpful when students planned differentiation for their assignment. Although the levels, like the Attainment Targets, are open to criticism, they were helpful in engaging students at this stage of their training with different types of assessment and an understanding of what areas could or could not be assessed. Currently many of the Agreed Syllabuses still contain both Attainment Targets and levels, which will exist until the next AS review. This creates confusion in some schools, which have been using levels to inform their planning and assessment, although most of my students were not introduced to levels in RE during their SEs. Following the advice of the *Commission on Assessment without Levels* (McIntosh, 2015), levels have been removed from primary assessment, and more complex models of assessment are currently being developed in RE. (Culham St. Gabriel Trust, Themed Grant Call: Assessment and Progression in RE, 2015). Assessment of RE is frequently weak in primary schools (Ofsted 2010), as teachers struggle with both what constitutes RE content and how that can be measured. Although I agree with some of the general arguments about the removal of levels to reduce stress and prevent a narrowing of the curriculum to assessable outcomes, in reality this directive has

resulted in teachers, who were familiar with levels as a way of assessment, not feeling secure in how to assess pupils' development or report it to parents, again potentially weakening the status of the subject.

Planning using *A Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England*, (REC, 2013) is now taught in this session alongside the older ATs, so that students are aware of the new developments and can adapt their planning when their local Agreed Syllabus is rewritten. As there is considerable discussion about possible replacement models for the levels, I am currently advising students to use Anderson and Krathwohl revisions of Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2000, Wilson, 2016) to critique their lesson planning and ensure RE is not reduced to the levels of remembering and understanding, but includes creating and evaluating. This taxonomy has already been introduced to the students in other modules so they have some familiarity with the generic ideas and it is reviewed using RE examples to encourage understanding. It has proved to be a successful reminder to consider assessment and improve the lesson plans students create for their assignments (see Findings).

I am very aware that teachers may receive little support through CPD later in their careers in RE (APPG, 2013; NATRE, 2016) unless they seek opportunities to become an RE co-ordinator. This means that what is learned on this module needs to be contextualised in a 'can do' attitude which encourages students to ask to teach RE in their next placement and during their NQT year. The RE Quality Mark (Bronze Level) is used to provide ideas for improvements in teaching and links are made to the content of the module and the requirements of the award. Through the module, links are made to the students' practical understanding of the classroom to encourage confidence and demonstrate that they are more competent than they might feel when faced with a subject of which they are nervous. Student feedback at the end of the module is consistently very positive, with higher levels of confidence indicated and recognition of the potentials that RE has in the primary classroom.

They report developments such as:

I will let the children talk more, express their own views and opinions about different religions and build on my pedagogies.

I can make lessons more open and therefore effective

I have more understanding of how I can appeal to a wide range of children across many different beliefs and religions.

RE is an opportunity to broaden thinking and encourage open questions.

(students' feedback, exit questionnaire, 2011-2013)

### 5.3 The BA RE assignment

Each year students submit assignments (See Appendix 3). The assignment structure is as follows:

**Part 1.** Plan 2 lesson outlines, using standard University lesson plan format for a Key Stage 1 or 2 lesson, on one aspect of your chosen religion or theme. These should be sequential and contain details of teacher input appropriate to the age and stage of the pupils, reference to resources and pupils' activities

**Part 2.** Write a rationale of the lesson plans, explaining how you considered:

- The aims of religious education
- Representation of religion/religions
- Your pedagogic choices and decisions
- Opportunities and types of assessment

These assignments are intended to demonstrate students' understanding of planning and progression in RE lessons. At this stage of their training the students are very familiar with a university lesson plan format so using this ensures that the students consider RE as seriously as other lessons and are supported in considering structure if they have had no experience of teaching RE before the module. It is a deliberate way of engaging the students' *phronesis* in planning in the specific subject area of RE. This is particularly important as some students are concerned that a lack of opportunity to teach on SE would limit their potential to achieve well in the module. Students are encouraged to plan using a class they had on SE so they can reflect children's backgrounds, educational needs and age-related expectations in their planning. The rationale is intended as a blend between theory and practice, so that students justify planning through reference to theory. The pragmatic focus on planning is chosen because of Ofsted reports about the variable quality of the lessons they observed (Ofsted, 2007; 2010; 2013), and the concerns students express during the module about their levels of confidence. If students can justify their planning in a written assignment, this could encourage them to plan and teach RE when on their final teaching practice. The emphasis on progress between two lessons is because some feedback has indicated they teach only isolated lessons, which means they have limited experience of pupil progression, both within a scheme of work and across age groups.

Discussing the assignment before submission, most students welcome the practical elements as they feel confident about planning, but are more concerned about the elements of the rationale which they see as theoretical.



I know what to do in the classroom, I'm good at the practical stuff. Planning's fine, it's explaining it in writing which is difficult.

(Student comment during Session 5, 2013)

Students frequently use references to representation in their assignments, but analysis demonstrates it is more difficult to embed the concepts of interpretation and reflexivity as securely during the module.

#### **5.4 Reflections on PGCE, GTP and School Direct teaching**

In contrast to the BA module, the PGCE RE module is taught in the first term of their training year, before their first block of teaching practice. Many of the students have experience of working in school as Teaching Assistants, although some may commence the course with only two weeks of observation. I cannot presume classroom experience and they do not have a specific written assignment on RE. Subject knowledge is formatively assessed through group presentations on individual religions, which also provide teaching opportunities to identify and communicate religious ideas and information to their peers. Recently the presentations have been focused around identification and response to questions children may ask about the religion being presented. The questions can operate as a gauge as to the groups' confidence and understanding of the religious material they are researching and presenting, varying from factual questions (What are the five pillars of Islam? What are the five Ks of Sikhism?) to more profound or nuanced interrogation of religious belief and practice ( Why do people go on *hajj* and what difference does it make to them? Do all Sikhs practise the five Ks?).

Decisions about the content and focus of the sessions varies as a result of the students' responses to the initial questionnaire, contributions in seminars or issues which arise through individual comments and questions during or after sessions. The visit to a place of worship has now been moved to the induction week of their course and serves as an introduction to learning beyond the classroom and a reminder of the diversity of faiths practised in London. There is less preparation for the visit, but the RE course commences immediately after induction so the students' responses can be gauged within a week of the visit. Generally, the PGCE students, perhaps because they are usually at least two years older than the BA students and have already gained academic degree qualifications, engage more quickly and with greater purpose in discussion activities and are able to more confidently explain their own identities and beliefs to others.

In contrast to the BAs, PGCE understanding of the process of teaching can be more naïve and less realistic and there is generally less understanding of differentiated planning and classroom management (fieldnotes, October, 2012).

This changes the emphasis on *phronesis* built into the BA module, as there is less shared understanding of classroom practice and less confidence in managing potentially controversial situations. This difference is marked when looking at the practicalities of managing resources in the classroom or setting meaningful learning objectives which the pupils will understand, so modelling of different scenarios is included in my teaching and learning objectives discussed in more depth. The contrast between the BA and PGCE students can be considerable at this stage and the PGCEs' ability to bring to bear phronetic judgements is generally more limited.

Week 3, Session 3 – two PGCE groups struggled with setting learning objectives related to Attainment Targets. The problem lay not with the concepts of 'learning about' and 'learning from', but how to phrase the learning objectives themselves in language which the children could understand. Needed to model child-friendly language so they could see how the ideas translated into activities. They could understand teacher- focused LOs, but the next step of making them work for children wasn't as natural- ownership of learning still more with teacher than pupil. Some concerns that it would be difficult to see if the LOs could be achieved. Need to revisit this in Session 5 when looking at assessment. (fieldnotes, October, 2013)

Student feedback on the module is very positive, echoing the understandings of the Year 2s, but less focused on the practicalities of teaching, perhaps because they have not yet been on placement. Overt focus on their *phronesis* is therefore less, as I need to include more explanation of classroom interaction at this stage of their training. Their comments focus strongly on the development in their understandings of the nature and value of RE in the classroom.

[My understanding of RE] has changed tremendously. The religious education teaching was a new subject for me as we do not teach RE in my country of origin (France). It has really opened my eyes to the importance of teaching religions and being inclusive and embracing all the differences of all religions and cultures. It really helped me to understand why we are teaching this subject at school and how it actually helps the children to be future citizens and to understand and respect their own community.

I have primary age children, when they started having RE lessons I thought ... why are [they] teaching you that religion?.. but I didn't mind, only I didn't see the point. Now I see why children need to know other religions

I feel this module has been useful, especially as I went to Catholic schools so I really felt as though I had no idea about any other religion before, but now I feel more confident.

(PGCE students' responses, exit questionnaire, 2014)

### **GTP and SD: adapting to different circumstances**

Different decisions are needed when providing centre-based training for Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) students (2010-2014) and School Direct students (2014-2016). These students are based in school and therefore are well-versed in classroom management, especially as their RE input is usually in the second half of their training year. They have two sessions of RE, each lasting at least one and a half hours, with pre-session and post-session tasks. These students are often drawn from partnership schools which also train or have trained BA and PGCE students, so there is familiarity with the university's training provision and shared understanding of assessment of teacher standards (Sheffield Hallam University and LPHG, 2012). The transition to School Direct provision has created more emphasis on the lead schools which organise school training, but the university provision for RE has remained the same.

Familiarity with the structures and expectations of the National Curriculum, and the working ethos of their partnership schools enables the RE training to be focused more explicitly on the subject's content and requirements, while building on shared understandings about primary values and purposes. Although these understandings are not frequently strongly articulated, there is clearly a shared understanding which enables students to quickly assess information and contextualise it in their own schools. This can be seen in the responses to the Aims Game which begins their sessions. Trainees placed in faith and church schools which have a clearly-defined religious character are more certain of the types of religious nurture those schools can provide for their students and accept and defend this as part of their purpose. Similar to the BA and PGCE students, tolerance and personal development are identified as aims of RE. Similar views were expressed by students in Sally Elton-Chalcraft's research with her students (Elton- Chalcraft, in preparation). The school context of their training strongly influences these trainees' attitudes and their understanding of RE is very dependent on the status of RE in their home school. There is inevitably a risk that these sessions can be seen as 'RE tips for teachers', and if a trainee cannot attend both sessions it is more difficult to develop their understanding beyond their school's immediate context. More recently, the

addition of a visit to a local *mandir* and attendance at a Holocaust Memorial event have deepened the trainees' engagement with the subject and it is now less likely to be seen as an isolated training event.

The content of the two sessions is taken from the longer BA and PGCE modules, so in Session 1 students engage in the artefact activity from Session 2, and in the last two years the Nepalese prayer flag activity from Session 4 which is linked to the artefact work and is used to exemplify elements of AT2. The second session contains the festival activities from Session 3, the spirituality activities from Session 4 with reconsideration of the prayer flag activity in a context of spirituality, and the assessment activities from Session 5.

In contrast to the PGCE students, the GTP and School Direct teachers automatically contextualise my teaching within their understanding of their own schools. Their perceptions of values and processes are very strong and they translate ideas such as social justice into their own classroom dynamics confidently. They also struggle with reified perceptions of subject knowledge, but are more able to recognise how to develop dialogue and agency in their classrooms. The time with them is too short and reinforces the difficulties faced by colleagues who deliver RE on their ITE courses within a similar or tighter time frame. Breaking down understanding of the different knowledges teachers use in the classroom cannot be shared, because it deflects from their requirements and representation is only lightly explored, to add to their understanding rather than transform it. The only way to improve this situation is to require more time spent on specific RE training within the School Direct programme. This is unlikely in the current climate of school-based training, which emphasises the problems of good provision when RE teaching in a school is weak and there is little CPD or subject leadership to improve it (Ofsted, 2013).

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

This chapter draws together conclusions from the research, demonstrating the blending of key ideas from the Interpretive Approach and *phronesis* into an effective and transformative ITE RE module for non-specialist primary student teachers. The chapter will include considerations and key recommendations for future developments in generalist RE teaching in primary RE ITE and potential areas for further initiatives in research and policy.

### **Using the Interpretive Approach in primary initial teacher religious education**

My decision to use the Interpretive Approach in the RE module lies in my personal experience of the Approach and recognition that it has key resonances with knowledge, attitudes and values which my students have already begun to develop as student teachers, but have not yet considered in terms of RE. These include an identification of RE with community cohesion, a deliberate consideration of positionality which is extended into teaching religions and an interrogation of how subject knowledge might be re-constructed for teachers of primary-aged children. Although the Approach is acknowledged as only one of several important approaches in RE, and has its critics, aspects of it offer potentially transformative, yet relatively accessible insights which students can embrace when planning, resourcing and teaching RE as beginner teachers.

From the beginning, the focus of research has been on the practicality of developing students' understanding within the confines of a short module. **How** can RE be taught, and how might the students consider aspects of the Interpretive Approach to be beneficial to their understandings? As the research progressed, engagement with the Interpretive Approach changed from presenting it as a methodology to selecting aspects of it to sensitise or challenge students' thinking. A range of activities were developed to introduce and reflect on three key aspects: representation, interpretation and reflexivity, and, through the process of research, these have been refined through my and students' reflections and their adoption into students' own planning and teaching.

### **The relationship between RE and community cohesion**

Throughout the research, students identified a key aim for RE as promoting 'tolerance of and sensitivity towards those with religious beliefs different from one's own' (Lazenby *et al.* 1993). This aim is contextualised through the experiences my cohorts have of multicultural

primary classrooms and is embedded in their understanding of inclusive practice. For many it resonates with their own experiences of misunderstanding and prejudice towards different cultures and religions. RE is identified by many teachers as a key area to develop tolerance and understanding in primary schools and this is regularly used as a justification for the subject. Acknowledging this and discussing tolerance is important at the beginning of the module as this builds on shared understandings, but recognition also has to be made of RE's limitations in this regard and its other aims (Ofsted, 2013). Developing children's values and attitudes is a school-wide, on-going process, in which the role of RE is acknowledged, but this is not the sole purpose of RE. Discussions are therefore broadened beyond cohesion among communities to recognition of other aspects of RE, such as self-understanding, the experience of religious belief and practice and an increased understanding of the world.

### **Representation**

For example, exploring the concept of representation through the layers of individual, group and religious tradition reconceptualises the students' understandings of subject knowledge, by showing there are more personalised ways to represent religious information for primary-aged children and identifying how individuals and families navigate through religious traditions. This is the concept which students understand and use most successfully. They recognise that representing all believers in a religion as believing and doing the same is an inaccurate and potentially damaging way of representing religious identity. They interrogate diversity from their own personal experience and adopt a pattern of talking of 'some' or 'many' rather than 'all' when discussing religious traditions. The impact of the Interpretive Approach's presentation of religions as multi-layered is indicated in the way students recognise the issues caused by stereotyping religious belief and practice and their welcoming of opportunities to teach about their own pupils' lives. This is made clear in their reflections on the module and by the student who vents her frustration over stereotypical assumptions of 'all Jews'.

Challenging the formulation of religious descriptions, which students expected as part of subject knowledge in the module, could be seen as increasing the complications of learning what to teach in RE, and adding to student anxieties about teaching the subject. Accurate subject knowledge is emphasised, but the nature of that knowledge is reconstructed as mutating rather than reified. Their feedback of at least 92% of students feeling improved levels of confidence over the period of the research indicates that the issue of increased

complexity is not a barrier to improved understanding, but rather provides a lens through which understanding of religions can be achieved for both teachers and pupils, because the emphasis is on acknowledging lived experience. Many students embrace this understanding of representation by bringing to bear moral judgements of fairness and inclusion to defend its importance. They recognise that it is ‘only fair’ and ‘right’ to tell children of differences, because then they will not perpetuate stereotypes. They feel strongly that all pupils’ voices should be heard in the classroom and that stereotypes and inaccuracies needed to be challenged, because they damage people’s perceptions of each other. They also recognise the tension between lived experiences and the type of RE they expected, which teaches fixed traditions, rather than recognising and affirming similarity and diversity within and between religions. Even though they acknowledge they do not know very much about difference in religious practices in most of the religions presented, breaking a stereotypical mould creates a new way forward. Examples of diversity of practice from their own experience can be articulated and explained, demonstrating immediately the value of multiple voices in the room and underlining the importance of dialogue in the classroom. For some students the recognition that they should know more about their pupils’ identities, beyond a religious label, is challenging, but, when contextualised as supporting children in their own identities, they immediately recognise its importance, as well as the need for sensitivity and dialogue.

### **Interpretation and Reflexivity**

Appreciation of interpretation and reflection is achieved through extensions of these conversations. Peer support is again important because of multiple understandings and the need to build confidence in articulating ideas about beliefs. Learning from Religion, although not used as an Attainment Target in recent RE documents, proves useful here as a way of introducing opportunities to invite students, and ultimately children, to consider their own thinking in the light of the topic being taught. Again students can be uncertain about interpretations of beliefs within traditions, but the desire to develop pupils’ confidence in thinking and expressing ideas is aligned to their understanding of good primary practice in speaking and listening, thus harnessing their practical wisdom about teaching, which is underpinned by values of inclusion and promotion of children’s voices. Opportunities for the development and expression of values, though not indicated as important by the students in their initial surveys, underpin activities which create opportunities for dialogue. It becomes clear that during activities students are referencing shared moral codes about teaching, which

are often assumed rather than articulated, but into which they have been enculturated, in particular through school experience.

### **The use of *phronesis* to support student development**

Identification of *phronesis* emerged from the process of the research itself. Once the students began to interrogate their expectations of knowledge in the module, increasingly they discussed the potential for RE in terms of their own experiences of pupils and RE in school. My demands on the students are higher than some of their initial expectations, because I expect them to continue research into religions alongside my focus on teaching, but this does not create anxiety or resentment, but rather reformulates the value of RE through the lens of their teaching experience. Flyvbjerg describes competent performers as ‘personally involved in their actions... [which] comprise an element of interpretation and judgement...[T]he ability to make these judgments becomes crucial at the upper levels of the learning process’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001,13). Year 2 student teachers are becoming competent in the classroom and increasingly are required to make rapid and individual decisions in the classroom to improve the learning environment for all their children. This is a transformative process as mistakes are identified and feedback, advice and reflection suggest alternative strategies. Competent teachers are expected to be expert in ‘thinking and behaviour which is rapid, intuitive, holistic, interpretive and visual’ ( Flyvbjerg, 2001,14) and students are encouraged to observe and develop such skills to enhance their own practice. I identify these skills and model from my own *phronesis* with the students specifically so that they are able to recognise and articulate the values which underpin my decision-making and refer back to their experiences with pupils in school.

There is an exciting synergy between a deepening understanding of the Interpretive Approach’s focus on diversity in representation, interpretation itself and the process of developing *phronesis*. As more is understood about multiple layers of identity and individual interpretations of religious practice in particular, teachers can become more nuanced in their engagement with pupils and their backgrounds in RE. Increasing awareness of one aspect influences understanding of the other positively. As student teachers become more competent and confident in including the backgrounds of their children in the content and process of their teaching, they become more conscious of the need to enquire further into children’s own understandings of the world. This creates a cycle of understanding which moves the student teacher further towards the competencies described by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1968) and



Flyvbjerg (2001). Being able to orchestrate learning so that each child recognises resonance with their own knowledge (in this case religious and cultural) is particularly skilful and rewarding and this is an approach to teaching and learning which RE can offer to other areas of the curriculum.

Through the stages of the module, students become more able to reposition knowledge into a new framework which references what they know of how children learn. Perhaps surprisingly, the anxieties about subject knowledge reduce because of the juxtaposition of subject knowledge and *phronesis*. Students realise that they can teach using religious examples which will introduce children to ideas and develop understandings **at a level with which children can identify**. This may appear an inappropriate oversimplification of what RE specialists know about teaching complex belief systems, but the aim of the module is not to make the students specialist RE teachers, but to recognise their growing expertise in knowing how children learn and how to effectively and engagingly teach RE to primary children in their classes. It is essential that, as a result of the module, students feel empowered and emboldened to teach RE as part of an affirming and engaging curriculum. The emphasis is moved onto pedagogy rather than subject knowledge because that is the strength of a primary teacher: the knowledge of how to teach pupils and how children learn, and this is where confidence can be grown. These are beginning teachers, constantly aware of what they do not know, and conscious they will be judged on their competency to teach across the curriculum. Encouraging their *phronetic* assessments of what will work in a primary RE classroom gives them insight into how to teach a challenging subject and harnesses the progress they have been making from novice teacher, through advanced beginner towards competent performer (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

### **Impact on understandings of *episteme* and *phronesis***

The student responses during the module reveal that the impact of the Interpretive Approach on their understanding of RE and pedagogy lies in reconsideration of the nature of knowledge, which both reconstructs students' assumptions about *episteme* and increases their confidence through recognition and affirmation of *phronesis*. My research identifies the paradigm of knowledge which many students bring to the module, formed by subject-driven curricula, which prioritises subject knowledge over other types of understanding. Before the module, students anticipate learning 'usable' subject knowledge (often identified as facts) and prioritise this above pedagogy in their expectations. This distances RE from their personal

experiences of the primary classroom, especially if they have had little or no experience of good RE on which to base their assumptions, because it pre-packages knowledge into reified descriptions, about which they can have anxieties, and reduces the importance of teaching itself.

A partial paradigm shift concerning epistemic knowledge can be perceived through students' recognition of individuals' and groups' contributions to knowledge about religions and worldviews, as the authority of formal or 'book' learning is challenged by explorations of individual's ideas and experiences. It is clear from their responses that students become less anxious about subject knowledge because of a change in their understanding of pedagogy in relation to RE. Rather than having to teach didactically, which they recognise as often inappropriate in primary classrooms, but appears to be a dominant model which they expect to use in RE and which immediately puts the emphasis on delivering knowledge, they begin to employ learning and teaching methods that impact positively on primary pupils' learning. Recalling good practice in other subject areas enables them to transfer this understanding into their planning of RE, although analysis of their assignments indicates that for some this understanding is still emerging at this stage. My research demonstrates that students also begin to reposition themselves and recognise themselves as sites of knowledge with authentic voices. This contextualises their personal knowledge and provides a model which can be used with children in the classroom to build a range of inquiries about a religious tradition. Such teaching requires more than a technical appreciation of the craft of teaching, because it is predicated on class teachers' knowledge of their children's backgrounds and their phronetic decisions surrounding the support of the learning process.

During the module students begin to appreciate the imbalance of their expectations, as the emphasis on pedagogy influences their perception of knowledge. They are more confident of being able to teach RE because they are reminded that they already have considerable knowledge of **how** to develop pupils' learning and can make judgements about what is appropriate and effective, based on the experiences they already have. They begin to perceive and articulate the difference between subject knowledge or **what** they teach, which they previously saw as fixed and systematised (*episteme*) and now see as more fluid and nuanced, and the practical wisdom they possess about teaching (*phronesis*), which includes **why and how** they teach, by engaging with moral understandings and intentions. Students are encouraged to view RE through the *phronetic* lenses they have been developing on teaching practice, so that there is a combining of teaching wisdom (*phronesis*) with some elements of

craft (*techne*) which, over the course of this research, appeared to notably increase their confidence and encourages them to see teaching RE as a rich and enjoyable experience. While concerns continue about controversial issues and sensitivities which may arise in RE lessons, the ‘normalising’ of RE as a subject in the primary curriculum reassures students that elements of good teaching recognised in other curriculum areas have a place in improving the quality of their RE.

This is particularly important in the current educational climate with low levels of RE CPD and limited opportunities to promote the subject and improve teachers’ knowledge base. If RE is to be improved in primary schools, it is particularly important that the subject does not isolate itself through perceptions of its own complexity. RE in primary schools should not be seen as a ‘watered-down’ version of Secondary RE, but as a subject which engages pupils at their stage of learning. If primary teachers are encouraged to contextualise RE lessons in the lived religious and spiritual experiences of children and their families, by raising interesting questions and creating considered reflections, the place of RE will be more secure, because that content reflects real life and is taught within a morally charged framework of *phronesis*. Secondary RE will benefit from pupils who are enthused by learning about religious practices and are skilled debaters who know how to sensitively phrase and articulate their ideas, because these skills have been established in primary schools. This is far preferable to pupils becoming disenchanted with the subject by learning which does not relate to the big questions they want to ask and has little resonance with their own lives.

The important contribution this research makes to understanding the preparation of primary students to teach RE lies in this rebalancing between *episteme* and *phronesis*. Subject knowledge is not down-played but made less formidable by emphasising that knowledge can be acquired as a process with pupils and that it is better that teachers tell pupils when they are not sure, than be prevented from teaching by fear of ignorance or causing offence. Questioning the nature and validity of knowledge is central to the humanities and RE, but the current erosion of these areas of the curriculum can mean that pupils do not question knowledge but merely acquire it. Nervousness of the subject matter of RE also can mean that student teachers feel obliged to transmit rather than investigate, yet it is precisely those investigative and enquiry models of learning which need to be strengthened in school.

The skilful teacher, in an open relationship with their pupils, can welcome new aspects of knowledge which fill in a jigsaw of understandings. In this way pupils who choose to

contribute information from their own experience can be affirmed by the teacher's use of their knowledge. It is crucial that teachers recognise and respect that pupils speak within their known understanding. Children should not be expected to speak as experts on their traditions, but as contributors, to fill out a more detailed picture which the class and teacher are creating together. This relationship is built on the professional understandings of teachers and their increasing understanding of appropriate and respectful dynamics in their classrooms. It requires practical application of a wisdom developed through observation and reflection on experience, and is already a familiar, of not yet fully-evolved, understanding for the student teacher. My research demonstrates the importance of recognising these different types of knowledge in teacher education. *Episteme* is privileged by the recognised position of subjects in the curriculum and perceptions of knowledge as paramount in education. There is also a clear elevation of *techne* through the emphasis on school-based training. But the recognition of *phronesis*, a more nebulous, but particularly important aspect of teaching, which is less measurable but essential to the promotion of value-informed education, needs to be recognised and promoted because it completes the moral purpose of education through its enriching and humanising influence on both *episteme* and *techne*. As both Biesta (2013) and Freire (1996) assert, the importance of education is that it educates for freedom and for agency, and without moral purpose neither of these can be achieved.

### **Personal Reflection**

A personal impact of the research has been on my own *phronesis*. Working with student teachers includes personal introspection and recognition of pathways and barriers to growth, including one's own. Each session evolves through small adjustments to teaching events which I select to illuminate my thinking behind the subject and those adjustments are informed by on-going interaction with the students. Each session is also an invitation to a type of RE which I believe in profoundly, demonstrating *episteme*, *phronesis* and personal engagement in the act of teaching. Not only are students developing their understanding and use of *phronesis*, but so am I, in particular in my understanding of positionality. I referred earlier to the ethical decisions made during teaching, and my adoption of a teacher rather than a researcher role when confronted with ethical decision-making. My perception of what constitutes student benefit in the moment can erect the very barriers I want to remove from my thinking as a researcher. Taking risks with students' understanding and creating opportunities for cognitive dissonance are examples of where I rely on *phronetic* perception

to guide me in the moment of teaching. This area of identifying and resolving ethical decisions during the teaching process would benefit from further research specifically in RE.

The sharing of *phronetic* understanding with students has made me sharply aware when ‘making the tacit explicit’ is achievable and when it is not. The section focusing on this in Session 2 cannot be replicated each year, as it needs to be created instantly with the students. Each experience accentuates the complexities which I and my students both need and choose to hold in tension. The melding of *phronesis* and the Interpretive Approach here is challenging for all of us and it is clear from feedback that students appreciate demonstrations of ‘teacher thinking’ to articulate the concerns they know they have, but do not always know they share. Subjects such as RE require constant vigilance to ensure that the process of learning is supportive and appropriate, so that the confidence which students teachers and pupils are developing is acknowledged and enriched in what can be profound processes and experiences.

### **Recommendations arising from the research**

Recommendations are framed in the recognition that qualified teachers frequently report inadequate training in RE in their ITE courses (NATRE, 2007, 2016). These reports indicate reductions in the provision of RE, both in time and by numbers of providers teaching RE to their students. This seriously challenges the continuing status of the subject in primary schools and raises increased concerns about the quality of provision in schools (REC, 2017). If student teachers receive little or no RE in their ITE training, unless they are training as specialists, they lose the opportunity to experience the powerful pedagogies and understandings the subject contains.

These recommendations therefore relate to the teaching of primary RE to generalist student teachers in ITE.

1. Modules in RE, or which include RE, should provide sufficient time and opportunity for students to develop their understanding and experience of good RE. My experience indicates this requires a minimum of nine hours, with a preference for twelve (REC, 2017), which should be made available for RE as a subject. If it is taught with other subjects, RE should have equivalent discrete time to enable students to understand its unique position in the curriculum, its purpose and potential.

2. Perceptions of subject knowledge should be interrogated with students so that they recognise the dangers of stereotyping and delivering reified approaches to individual religions. Specific attention should be shown to developing subject knowledge which recognises diversity within and between religions and worldviews and is appropriate to the age and stage of the pupils. Representation of religions in particular needs to reflect lived experience.
3. Student teachers' personal understandings of religion and religious observance need to be directly considered during training so that students can develop their own relationship with the material they are teaching. Positionality needs to be considered and interrogated so that students have an articulated professional position from which to approach the subject and from which they can respond to both pupils and parents appropriately.
4. Primary RE needs to be developed with student teachers building on pedagogies with which they are familiar in other curriculum areas and which are known to engage and challenge pupils. Dialogic and enquiry learning, which are specifically encouraged and experienced through activities such as using artefacts and when students question each other to improve their understandings of dialogue, have particular relevance and should be linked to their wider understanding of good teaching. In order that they develop beyond *techne* to *phronesis* students require experience of models of teaching underpinned by theoretical understandings of pedagogy, to enable their selection of appropriate strategies for learning. Student teachers need to recognise that the planning and teaching of RE is as skilful as other curriculum areas and that their developing competence should include RE as part of the primary curriculum.
5. Recognition of the benefits of developing *phronesis* should be incorporated into all training to encourage students to build interrogation of values and situations into their understanding of good teaching. A combination of practical wisdom and learning theories encourage students to plan and teach RE which is appropriate to their own classes. This is much more than *techne*. Students need to rehearse situations which require rapid decision-making so that they can tackle challenging questions appropriately and understand how they make decisions based on their interpretation of the needs of individuals and groups of children as well as appropriate and informed representation of religious traditions.
6. All students should have a minimum requirement to teach RE at least twice on each school experience. This would be applicable to all training routes and should include

planning, teaching and assessment of both the pupils' progress and the quality of the student teachers' lessons. My research indicated that students who had taught RE on placement approached the subject with a much greater understanding of classroom issues, and had begun to develop their own positionality *vis a vis* the subject.

## **Conclusions**

RE has much to offer the generalist primary teacher once their anxieties have been acknowledged and at least in part addressed. Students recognise RE as a key subject in exploring the cultural backgrounds of their pupils, and promoting empathetic opportunities in class. They identify RE also as one of the key sites to affirm pupils' backgrounds and promote respect of others. These affirmations of RE indicate that student teachers recognise the role of the subject in promoting important understandings and values for the school and society. Although there is a debate in RE circles about the parameters and purposes of the subject, primary student teachers involved in this research clearly see it as central to developing social and community cohesion and multicultural and intercultural understandings in the classroom. This interrogation of RE's purposes also resonates strongly with the developing application of the Interpretive Approach in Europe, where it underpins intercultural understandings. Using elements of the Interpretive Approach through the module encourages patterns of thinking which challenge students to improve the relationship between the content of taught RE and recognition of pupils' own home lives, and perceptions of lived religious and non-religious experience around them. It also introduces an approach to RE and school ethos which embraces the social justice issues which many student teachers consider are fundamental to inclusive education, and provides possible links which students may explore in their future careers, such as human rights, pupil empowerment and culturally responsive teaching (Villegas and Lucas, 2002a,b; Jackson and McKenna, 2005; Ambe, 2006; Jackson *et al.*, 2007; Keast, 2007; Weisse, 2007; Jackson, 2014). These would be valuable sites of further research for both ITE and CPD providers and teachers.

There is a further aspect in RE teaching which students find exciting: that of working outside the National Curriculum. By the end of the module they are becoming braver in their thinking, partly as a result of the session on Spirituality which they frequently cite as one of the pivotal moments in moving their understanding on. Here is an opportunity for them to step beyond the assessment demands placed upon them, (especially by Literacy and Mathematics), which are connected to national assessment, and see RE as an opportunity to

experiment. This can be a brave moment for students who are training and are wary of taking risks, but their feedback about inspiration and openness in teaching RE indicates that the development in teaching persona, which emerged from the analysis of the exit questionnaire, is important in their exploration of what type of teacher they wish to be. Because the students perceive risks in teaching RE, the experience of recognising their own knowledge as valuable is affirming for students. An example is the student who so confidently interweaves his own knowledge of the Hindu Tradition with perceptions of what will challenge and enrich his pupils' learning. His selection of an aspect of knowledge and its development through representation into interpretation and reflexivity to engage his pupils in considering respect, demonstrates how teaching the Interpretive Approach to student teachers can create an understanding of religion which resonates with both pupils' and teachers' lives and can create profound opportunities to understand human and religious experiences.

Reflecting on and with student teachers has deepened my own awareness of the potential RE has in the curriculum and the underlying philosophies which underpin my teaching. There is, always, as a spine to a teaching persona, the *phronesis* which operates unstintingly, making judgements which are intended for the good of students or pupils. Gert Biesta (2013) writes of 'the beautiful risk' of education, which I find profoundly moving, because I am conscious of the risks which are taken continuously through teaching in RE and the value of those risks in promoting human understanding. RE pushes at boundaries of thought, disturbs paradigms and asks profound questions of learners. Teachers need to know how and why, in the moment, to make decisions with which they guide a child or children's learning. This is the process of *phronesis* which requires trust between the actors in the learning and is informed by a vision of the purpose of education for the good of all.



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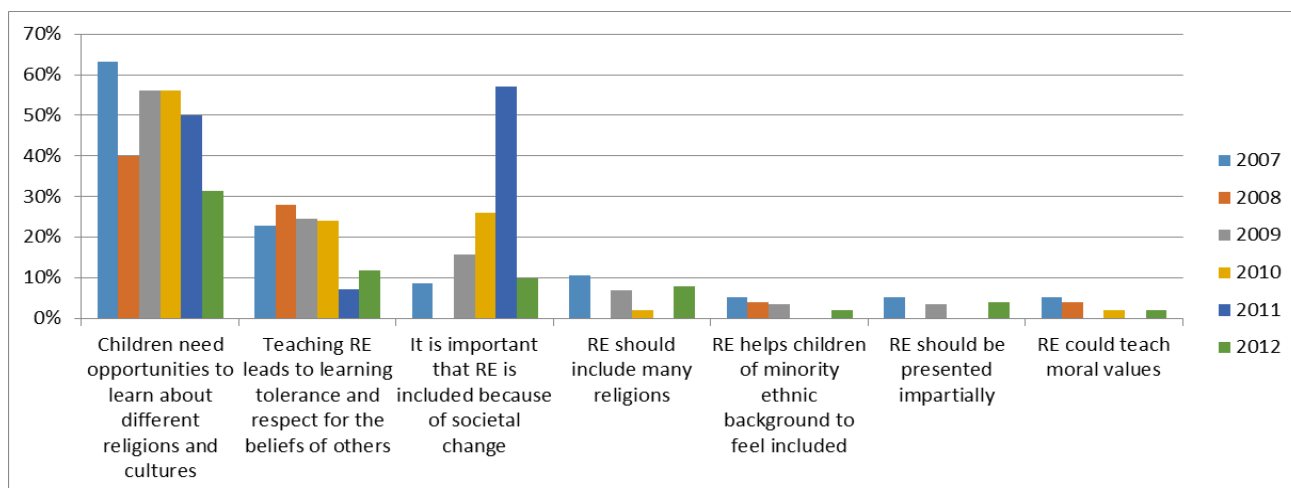
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## Appendix 1: Data for Chapter 4

### Appendix 1.1 – Analysis of seven themes in response to Question 1: What are your views on religious education being taught in British primary schools?



| Response  | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Children need opportunities to learn about different religions and cultures   | 63%  | 40%  | 56%  | 56%  | 50%  | 31%  |
| Teaching RE leads to learning tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others | 23%  | 28%  | 25%  | 24%  | 7%   | 12%  |
| It is important that RE is included because of societal change                | 9%   | 0%   | 16%  | 26%  | 57%  | 10%  |
| RE should include many religions  | 11%  | 0%   | 7%   | 2%   | 0%   | 8%   |
| RE helps children of minority ethnic background to feel included              | 5%   | 4%   | 4%   | 0%   | 0%   | 2%   |
| RE should be presented impartially  | 5%   | 0%   | 4%   | 0%   | 0%   | 4%   |
| RE could teach moral values   | 5%   | 4%   | 0%   | 2%   | 0%   | 2%   |

### Appendix 1.2 – Student responses to Question 2 in terms of attitude, shown across six years.

| Attitude                               | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | Avg |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|
| Positive (good, important etc)         | 60%  | 28%  | 61%  | 40%  | 50%  | 49%  | 48% |
| Pragmatic (useful, necessary, helpful) | 19%  | 36%  | 21%  | 22%  | 13%  | 31%  | 24% |
| Negative                               | 4%   | 4%   | 0%   | 0%   | 0%   | 0%   | 1%  |
| No comment                             | 18%  | 32%  | 18%  | 38%  | 38%  | 20%  | 27% |



**Appendix 1.3 - Average percentages collected over 6 iterations of question 3, showing the seven main themes indicated in the students' responses**

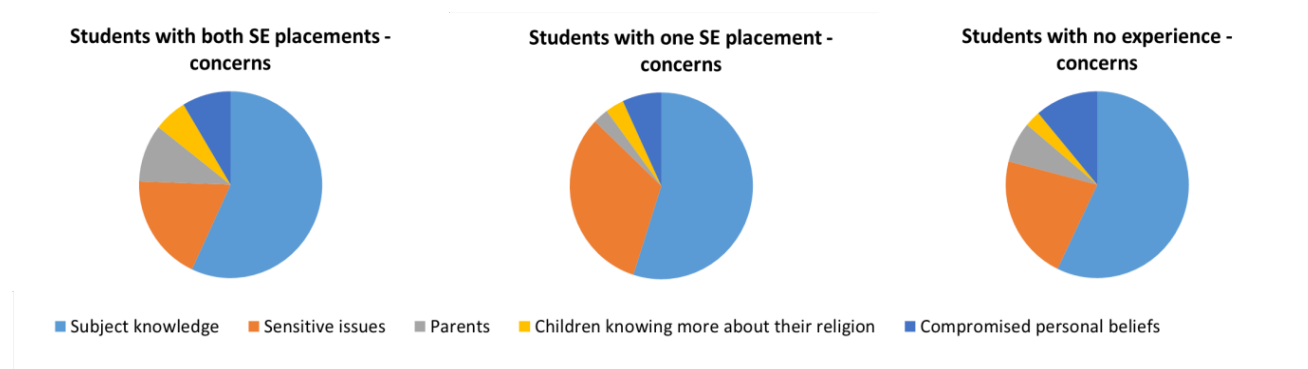
|  | 2007 | 2009 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | Average |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------|
| Subject knowledge  | 89%  | 86%  | 84%  | 62%  | 71%  | 65%  | 76%     |
| Ideas of how to teach RE                                     | 56%  | 70%  | 46%  | 42%  | 42%  | 31%  | 48%     |
| How to manage sensitive issues                               | 25%  | 24%  | 18%  | 8%   | 4%   | 8%   | 14%     |
| Information on resources                                     | 12%  | 14%  | 4%   | 4%   | 4%   | 2%   | 7%      |
| How to work with children to engage them / help them discuss | 9%   | 18%  | 7%   | 2%   | 0%   | 0%   | 6%      |
| How to be inclusive  | 7%   | 2%   | 7%   | 0%   | 4%   | 6%   | 4%      |
| How to assess RE   | 7%   | 4%   | 4%   | 0%   | 0%   | 2%   | 3%      |
| How to teach about morals and values                         | 7%   | 0%   | 0%   | 0%   | 0%   | 0%   | 1%      |

**Appendix 1.4 – Number of students who have taught each religion on placement. Students who taught a topic may have included up to three religions in their teaching**

|                         | 2007      | 2008      | 2009      | 2010      | 2011     | 2012      |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| <b>Christianity KS1</b> | <b>6</b>  | <b>6</b>  | <b>11</b> | <b>6</b>  | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Christianity KS2</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>13</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>16</b> |
| <b>Islam KS1</b>        | <b>0</b>  | <b>2</b>  | <b>5</b>  | <b>2</b>  | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b>  |
| <b>Islam KS2</b>        | <b>5</b>  | <b>5</b>  | <b>5</b>  | <b>6</b>  | <b>2</b> | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Judaism KS1</b>      | <b>5</b>  | <b>1</b>  | <b>2</b>  | <b>5</b>  | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Judaism KS2</b>      | <b>3</b>  | <b>4</b>  | <b>5</b>  | <b>7</b>  | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Hinduism KS1</b>     | <b>0</b>  | <b>0</b>  | <b>0</b>  | <b>0</b>  | <b>1</b> | <b>0</b>  |
| <b>Hinduism KS2</b>     | <b>4</b>  | <b>4</b>  | <b>6</b>  | <b>3</b>  | <b>3</b> | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Buddhism KS1</b>     | <b>1</b>  | <b>0</b>  | <b>0</b>  | <b>1</b>  | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b>  |
| <b>Buddhism KS2</b>     | <b>3</b>  | <b>2</b>  | <b>4</b>  | <b>3</b>  | <b>1</b> | <b>0</b>  |
| <b>Sikhism KS1</b>      | <b>2</b>  | <b>0</b>  | <b>1</b>  | <b>1</b>  | <b>0</b> | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Sikhism KS2</b>      | <b>2</b>  | <b>1</b>  | <b>3</b>  | <b>0</b>  | <b>1</b> | <b>3</b>  |



## Appendix 1.5 – comparison of student concerns by teaching experience

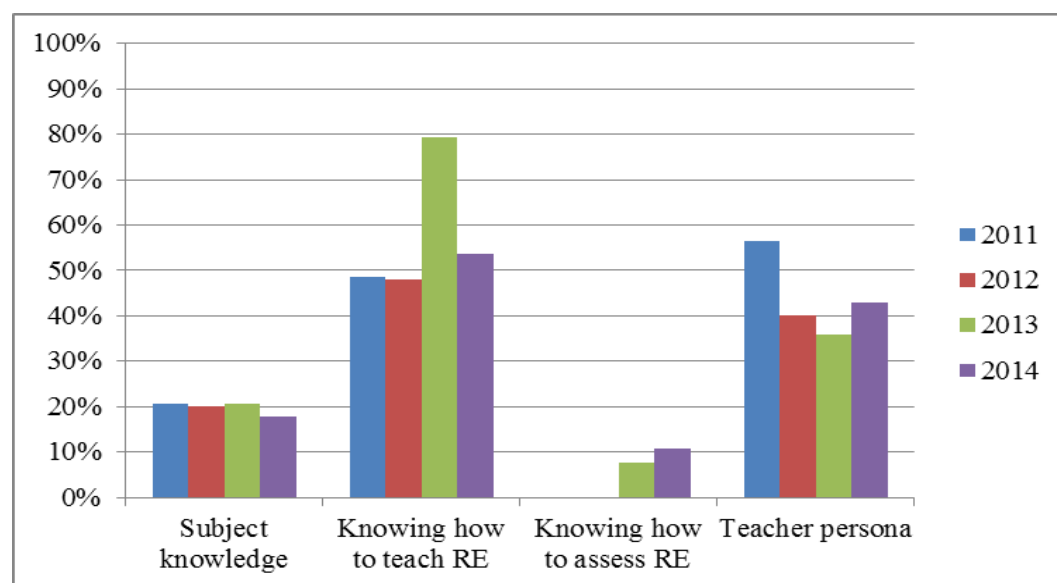


|  | SEx2 | SEx1 | No exp |
|--|------|------|--------|
| Subject knowledge                          | 57%  | 55%  | 57%    |
| Sensitive issues                           | 19%  | 32%  | 22%    |
| Parents                                    | 10%  | 3%   | 7%     |
| Children knowing more about their religion | 6%   | 3%   | 3%     |
| Compromised personal beliefs               | 9%   | 7%   | 11%    |

## Appendix 1.6 – aspects of RE teaching which students think would help them on practice. Tallied across four years against the main themes

|                                    | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 4yr total |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-----------|
| Subject Knowledge                  | 12   | 14   | 12   | 4    | 42        |
| How to teach RE                    | 107  | 90   | 100  | 38   | 335       |
| How to manage sensitive issues     | 1    | 2    | 0    | 1    | 4         |
| Information on resources           | 0    | 2    | 4    | 0    | 6         |
| How to assess RE                   | 10   | 7    | 15   | 0    | 32        |
| How to teach about morals & values | 1    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 2         |
| Visits to places of worship        | 0    | 0    | 10   | 4    | 14        |

**Appendix 1.7 Exit Questionnaire - Percentage of students who identified four main reasons for increased confidence in their answer over 4 years**



|                          | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | Avg |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|-----|
| Subject knowledge        | 21%  | 20%  | 21%  | 18%  | 20% |
| Knowing how to teach RE  | 49%  | 48%  | 79%  | 54%  | 57% |
| Knowing how to assess RE | 0%   | 0%   | 8%   | 11%  | 5%  |
| Teacher persona          | 56%  | 40%  | 36%  | 43%  | 44% |

**Appendix 1.8 – Responses to question 4 of exit questionnaire, grouped by main themes**

|                                      | 2007 | 2009 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | Average |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------|
| Subject knowledge                    | 89%  | 86%  | 84%  | 62%  | 71%  | 65%  | 76%     |
| Ideas of how to teach RE             | 72%  | 90%  | 60%  | 44%  | 46%  | 37%  | 48%     |
| How to manage sensitive issues       | 25%  | 24%  | 18%  | 8%   | 4%   | 8%   | 14%     |
| Information on resources             | 12%  | 14%  | 4%   | 4%   | 4%   | 2%   | 7%      |
| How to assess RE                     | 7%   | 4%   | 4%   | 0%   | 0%   | 2%   | 3%      |
| How to teach about morals and values | 7%   | 0%   | 0%   | 0%   | 0%   | 0%   | 1%      |

## Appendix 2

### The RE Module: Content, Aims and Activities

| Session | Content  | Aims   | Description of activities   |
|---------|--|--|---|
| 1       | <b>Introduction to RE</b><br>-Aims Game<br><br>-historical and legal<br>-pedagogical developments in RE<br><br>-Account of the story of the Buddha<br>-Eightfold Path  | -Encourage students to discuss their own attitudes and experiences about teaching RE<br><br>-Introduce students to some historical and legal aspects of RE to ensure they understand their professional responsibilities<br><br>-Engage students using a didactic teaching approach-exemplifying AT1 , issues around phenomenology<br>Discuss the use of story in RE | -Small group activity- aims discussed and sorted<br>Large group discussion about aims<br><br>-presentation of information to inform about RE and enable students to later critique the teaching approaches used during the module.<br><br>-Artefacts of the Buddha used to engage interest<br>- Presentation using Sri Lankan illustrations to support telling the story of the Buddha and description of the Eightfold Path<br>- ideas for lesson plans and pedagogy discussed.  |
| 2       | <b>Investigating artefacts</b><br>Artefacts used:<br>-Muslim prayer mat and compass<br>-Prayer beads:<br>Christian rosaries,<br>Muslim <i>tasbeih</i> ,<br>Buddhist and Hindu prayer beads (including one set and bag from ISKCON) | -To give students experience of handling and learning about religious artefacts<br>-To develop dialogue about religious knowledge and experience in small groups<br>-To introduce a methodology for investigating artefacts (developed by Grimmer <i>et al.</i> , 1991)<br>-To develop students' knowledge about 6 major religions and                               | -Artefacts distributed and questions provided to stimulate discussion. Students asked to consider various responses to the artefacts e.g. sensory response, knowledge response and possible pupil response. 'insider' students act as interpreters of the artefacts.<br>-Printed information given to assist presentations<br>-Artefacts presented by students, explaining their use within a domestic context and how they might be used in lessons.<br>-I and other students give further information about their use and variation in use by different groups within a tradition |

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
|   | <p>-Jewish <i>challah</i> cover, <i>havdalah</i> candle and spice box</p> <p>-a Hindu <i>puja</i> tray</p> <p>-Sikh 5 Ks</p>   | <p>introduce <b>representation</b></p> <p>-To develop students' understanding of diversity in religious observance in family life</p> <p>-To discuss sensitivities and appropriate use of artefacts in lessons</p> <p>-To reflect on the use of artefacts as an aspect of identity</p>   |   |
| 3 | <p><b>Celebrating festivals</b></p> <p>Students make: clay <i>diya</i> lamps and Christingles, and use <i>seder</i> plates to learn about <i>Pesach</i></p> <p>Children's story of the <i>Ramayana</i></p>             | <p>-To develop students' knowledge of festivals, using activities to understand pupil engagement.</p> <p>-To develop students' understanding of symbolism in religious practice</p>  | <p>- Students identify festivals they know and recognising diversity in practice, using <b>IA</b></p> <p>-Students consider a whole school Christmas planning spiral to deepen understanding of engagement as children grow</p> <p>- Activities undertaken so students consider the learning opportunities promoted through 'making', listen to an abridged <i>Ramayana</i> and discuss the religious and social meaning of the story (focus on duty)</p> <p>-Students discuss symbolism of the Christingle and its connection to Christian beliefs</p> <p>-The story of Moses, his importance in other religions and the significance of <i>Pesach</i> explored through items on the <i>Seder</i> plate.</p> |
| 4 | <p><b>Exploring Spirituality</b></p> <p>Discussion</p> <p>Stilling activity</p> <p>Nepalese prayer flags</p> <p>Spirited Arts</p> <p>Considering what makes a good RE lesson</p> <p>Considering models of dialogue</p> | <p>-To explore the concept of spirituality in the context of education</p> <p>-Consider and experience activities which may promote personal understandings of spirituality</p> <p>-encounter pupils' contributions on the theme of spirituality</p> <p>-to explore dialogue and questioning as a means of developing quality RE lessons</p> | <p>- students discuss their own understandings of spirituality in personal and educational terms</p> <p>-students participate, if willing, in a stilling exercise</p> <p>- students construct their own strings of prayer flags with messages they want to share with the world</p> <p>- students consider examples of primary pupils' work from 'Spirited Arts'</p> <p>-students consider a variety of ways to explore spirituality with pupils</p>  |

|   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
|   |   | -discussion of dialogue in the classroom   |   |
| 5 | <b>Assessment and quality</b><br>Critiquing pupils' work<br>QCA levels/REC aims<br>Planning good RE<br>REQM | -Ensure students can articulate different pedagogies with examples<br>-Ensure students understand rigour in RE<br>-Ensure students have considered both knowledge and reflection in assessment and consider deepening understanding<br>-Introduce students to REQM as a way of influencing quality of RE in their future schools | - students recall activities and teaching from the module which have developed their understanding of RE<br>- students critique an example of pupil's work to understand assessing through ATs (QCA, 2004) and Aims of RE (REC, 2013)<br>-Students discuss assessment without levels<br>- students identify transferrable understandings about good teaching between RE and other areas of the curriculum<br>Discussion of assignment |

## Appendix 3

### Assignment details:

#### Part 1.

**Plan 2 lesson outlines, using standard University planning formats for either KS1 or KS2 lessons, on an aspect of your chosen religion or theme.**

**These should be sequential and contain details of teacher input appropriate to the age and stage of the pupils, reference to resources and pupils' activities, differentiation and assessment**

#### Part 2.

**Write a rationale of the session plans, explaining how you considered:**

- **The aims of religious education**
- **Representation of religion/religions**
- **Your pedagogic choices and decisions**
- **Opportunities for and types of assessment**

**Word limit for Part 2 = 1500**

#### *Notes*

*The lesson plans should be achievable in terms of time and classroom management. References to resources or examples of materials used in sessions should be included. Your rationale should include the relationship of the assessment to the learning objectives and a range of assessment opportunities. Particular attention should be given to how children learn from religions and worldviews, to demonstrate understanding of this aspect of children's learning. Lesson plans from SBT2 can be used but need to be developed to include the required information.*

#### **Success criteria for the assignment:**

A good assignment includes:

- detailed session plans
- a clear and thorough explanation of why the various components of the session have been included.
- Reference to different pedagogical models discussed on the course and why particular approaches have been selected for the planned sessions.
- Reference in the critique to wider reading to support decisions about content and approaches.

Assignments should be clearly expressed in appropriate English, with references and bibliography using Harvard referencing.

| Grade | Class of degree | Success criteria   |
|-------|-----------------|--|
| 1-4   | First class     | The assignment will display a detailed and nuanced knowledge of the religion or theme which is the subject of the sessions and consider religious representation. The sessions will be well-planned with detailed differentiation, a good range of appropriate |

|       |              |  |
|-------|--------------|--|
|       |              | resources and clear linking between learning objectives and assessment opportunities. In the critique there is a detailed explanation of the choice of pedagogical models with sharply perceived analysis and application of theory. The critique will include explanation of how children can learn about religions and how they can reflect on their own understandings and experiences. Assessment should be imaginatively developed within the planning. The critique will show the relation and integration of the subject knowledge and teaching. The work will demonstrate wide-ranging specialized skills and technical vocabulary specific to the subject   |
| 5-8   | Upper second | The assignment will display a detailed knowledge of the religion or theme which is the subject of the sessions and consider religious representation. The sessions will be clearly planned, differentiated, with appropriate resources and evident connections between learning objectives and assessment opportunities. In the critique there is a detailed explanation of the choice of pedagogical models with clear analysis and application of theory. The critique will include reference to how children can learn about religions and how they can reflect on their own understandings and experiences. Assessment should be thoughtfully developed within the planning. The critique will show the relation and integration of the subject knowledge and teaching. The work will demonstrate good specialized skills and technical vocabulary specific to the subject |
| 9-12  | Lower second | The assignment will display a descriptive knowledge of significant features of the religion or theme which is the subject of the sessions and partial consideration of religious representation. The sessions will be adequately planned with some appropriate resources and linking between learning objectives and assessment opportunities. In the critique there is a limited explanation of the choice of pedagogical models with some elements of analysis and application of theory. The work will demonstrate some specialized skills and technical vocabulary specific to the subject.  |
| 13-16 | Third        | The assignment will display a limited knowledge of the religion or theme which is the subject of the sessions and there will be little or no consideration of religious representation within and/or across religious traditions. The lessons will be planned with appropriate resources and links between learning objectives and assessment opportunities. In the critique there is a reference to pedagogical models but the analysis will be limited. There will be limited reference to theory. The work will demonstrate few specialized skills and technical vocabulary specific to the subject.  |
| 19    | Fail         | An assignment will fail if any of the elements stated in the guidance are missing or the quality of the assignment does not meet the above criteria.   |